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QUEEN ELEANOR AND FAIR ROSAMOND.

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CHAPTER VI.

PERPLEXITIES.

WHAT was she to do ?

It is not often in life that a woman is brought to such an emergency without warning, without time for preparation. She did nothing at all at first, and felt capable of nothing but to stare blankly, almost stupidly, at her supplanter. She did not feel capable even of rising from the chair into which she had sunk in the utter blank of consternation. She could only gaze, interrogating not the face before her only, but heaven and earth. Was it true ? Could it be true ?

The young woman was evidently surprised by this pause. She too looked curiously at her visitor, waited for a minute, and then advancing a step, asked, with a tone in which there was some surprise and a faint shadow of impatience, 'Is it anything that I can do ?'

'Have you been married long ?' This was all the visitor could say.

A pretty blush came over the other's face. 'We were married in the end of April,' she said. It still seemed quite natural to her that everybody should be interested in this great event. 'We went abroad for a month. And we were so lucky as to find this house. You know my husband ?'

'I think so : well ; his Christian name is——'

'Robert is his Christian name. Oh, I am so glad to meet with any one who has known him !' She drew a chair with a pretty

vivacious movement close to that on which her visitor sat. 'I feel sure,' she said, 'you are a relation, and have come to find out about us.'

There was something in the young creature's air so guileless, so assured in her innocence, that if there had been any fury in the other's heart, or on her tongue, it must have been arrested then; but there was no fury in her heart. After the first unspeakable shock of surprise there was nothing but a great pang, and that almost more for this young life blighted than for her own. 'It is true,' she said, 'that I am a—connection. Is your mother alive?'

'Mamma?' cried the girl, with a laugh. 'Oh yes, and she is here to-day. She does not live with us, you know. She would not. She says married people should be left to themselves; though I always told her, Mr. Landon was far too sensible to believe in that trash about mothers-in-law. Don't you think it is rubbish? Young men may believe it; but when a gentleman is experienced and knows the world——'

'Perhaps I could see your mother,' said the old wife. She felt herself growing a little faint. The day was warm, and she had been travelling all night. Was not that enough to account for it? And this happy babble in her ear made her heart sick, which was more.

'Mamma? Oh yes, certainly she will be very glad to see you. She always wanted to see some of the relations. She said it was not natural; though, to be sure, at his age—— Shall I go and tell her you want to see her—her and not me? But you must not take any prejudice against me. Don't, please, if you are his relation: and you look so nice too. I know I should love you if you would let me.'

'Let me see your mother. I have no—prejudice.' She scarcely knew what she was saying. The room was swimming in her eyes, the green of the closed blinds waving up and down, surrounding her with an uncertain mist of colour, through which she seemed to see a half-reproachful, wondering look. And then the white figure was gone. Mrs. Lycett-Landon leant her head upon the back of the chair, and for a minute knew nothing more. Then the greenness became visible again, and gradually everything wavered and circled back into its place.

The little house was very still; there were hurried steps overhead, as if two people were moving about. It was the mother

hastily being put in order for a visitor; her cap arranged, a clean collar put on; the young wife dancing about her in great excitement to make all nice. This process of decoration occupied some time, and as it went on the visitor came fully to herself. What should she do? As she recovered full command of herself she shrunk from inflicting such a blow even upon the mother. Should she go away before they came down?—disappear like a dream, take no notice, but leave the strange little drama—what was it, comedy or tragedy?—to work itself out? Why should she interfere, after all? If he liked this best—and all the harm was now done that could be done; the best thing was to go away and take no more notice. She had risen with this intention, to slip away, to let herself out, not to interfere, when another sound became audible, the sound of a door opening in the back part of the house. Then a voice called ‘Rose,’ a voice which, in spite of herself, made the visitor’s brain swim once more. She had to stop again perforce. And then a step came towards the room in which she was; a heavy step, with a little gouty limp in it—a step she knew so well. It came along the passage, accompanied by a running commentary of half-complaint. ‘Where are you? I want you.’ Then the door of the little drawing-room was pushed open. ‘Why don’t you answer me?’ He paused there in the doorway, seeing a stranger—with a quick apology—‘I beg your pardon.’ Then suddenly there came from him a cry—a roar like that of a wounded animal—‘ELEANOR!’

Neither of the two ever forgot the appearance of the other. She saw him with the little passage and its stronger light opening behind him, his large figure relieved against it; the sudden look of consternation, horror, utter amaze in his face. Horror came first; and then everything yielded to the culprit’s sense of unspeakable downfall, guilt self-convicted and without excuse. He fell back against the wall; his jaw dropped; his eyes seemed to turn upon themselves in a flicker of mortal dismay. The entire failure of all force and self-defence did not disarm his wife, as might have been supposed, but filled her with a blaze of sudden vehemence, passion which she could not contain. She had said his name as he said hers, in a quiet tone enough; but now stamped her foot and cried out, feeling it intolerable, insupportable. ‘Well!’ she cried, ‘stand up for it like a man! Say you are sick of me, of your children, of living honestly these fifty years. Say something for yourself. Don’t stand there like a whipped child.’

But the man had nothing to say. He stood against the wall and looked at her as if he feared a personal assault. Then he said, 'She is not to blame. She is as innocent as you are.'

'I have seen her,' said the injured wife. 'Do you think you need to tell me that? But then, what are you?'

He made no reply. And the sight of him in the doorway was unbearable to the woman. If he had stood up for himself, made a fight of any kind, it would have been more tolerable. But the very sight of him was insupportable—something she could not endure. She turned her head away and went quickly past him towards the open door. 'I meant to tell her mother.' She scarcely knew whether she was speaking or only thinking. 'I meant to tell her mother, but I cannot. You must manage it your own way.'

Next moment she found herself out in the street walking along under the shadow of the blank wall. She was conscious of having closed both doors behind her, that of the house and that of the garden. If she could but have closed the door of her own mind, and put it out of sight, and shut it up for ever! She hurried away, walking very quickly round one corner after another, through one street after another, of houses enclosed in walls and railings, withdrawn among flowers and trees. You may walk long through these quiet places without finding what she wanted, a cab to take her out of this strange, still, secluded town of villas. When she found one at last, she told the driver to take her back to the Euston, but first to drive round Hyde Park. He thought she must be mad. But that did not matter much so long as she was able to pay the fare. And then there followed what she had wanted, a long, endless progress through a confusion of streets, first quiet, full of gardens and retired houses; then the long bustling thoroughfares leading back into the noisy world of London; then the quiet streets on the north side of the park, the trees of Kensington Gardens, the old red palace, the endless line of railings and trees on the other side; the bustle of Piccadilly, so unlike the bustle of the other streets. Naturally the hansom could not go within the enclosure of the park, but only by the streets. But she did not care for that. She wanted movement, the air in her face, silence so that she might think.

So that she might think! But a woman can no more think when she wills than she can be happy when she wills. All that she thought was this, going over and over it, and back and back upon it, putting it involuntarily into words and saying them to

herself like a sort of dismal refrain. At fifty! After living honestly all these fifty years! Was it possible? was it in the heart of man? At fifty, after all these years! This wonder was so great that she could think of nothing else. And he had been a good man: kind, ready to help; not hard upon any one: fond of his family, liking to have them about him. And now at fifty! after living honestly——. She did not think of it as a matter affecting herself, and she could not think of what she was to do, which was the thing she had intended to think of, when she bade the man drive to the other end of the world. When she perceived, as she did dimly in the confusion of her mind, that she was approaching the end of her long round, she would but for very shame have gone over it all again. But by this time she had begun to see that little would be gained by staving it off for another hour, and that sooner or later she must descend from that abstract wandering, which had been more like a wild flight into space than anything else, and meet the realities of her position. Ah heavens! the realities of her position were—first of all, Horace, her boy—her grown-up boy: no longer a child to whom a family misfortune could be slurred over, but a man, able to understand, old enough to know. Her very heart died within her as this suddenly flashed upon her deadened intelligence. Horace and Milly—a young man and a young woman. How was she to tell them what their father had done? At fifty! after all these years!

She was told at the hotel that the young gentleman had gone out—for which she was deeply thankful—but would be back immediately. Oh, if he might but be detained; if something would but happen to keep him away! She came up the great vulgar common stairs which so many people trod, some perhaps with hearts as heavy as hers, few surely with such a problem to resolve. How to tell her boy that his father——oh God! his father, whom he loved and looked up to; his kind father, who never grudged him anything; a man so well known; a good man, of whom everybody spoke well—to tell him that his father——. She locked the door of her room instinctively, as if that would keep Horace out, and keep her secret concealed.

It was one of those terrible hotel rooms, quite comfortable and wholly unsympathetic, in which many of the sorest hours of life are passed, where parents come to part with their children, to receive back their prodigals, to look for the missing, to receive

tidings of the worse than dead ; where many a reconciliation has to be accomplished, and arrangement made that breaks the heart. Strange and cold and miserable was the unaccustomed place, with no associations or soothing, no rest or softness in it. She walked about it up and down, and then stopped, though the movement gave her a certain relief, lest Horace should come to the door, hear her, and call out in his hearty young voice to be admitted. She had not been able to think before for the recurrence of that dismal chorus, 'At fifty!' and now she could not think for thinking that any moment Horace might come to the door. She was more afraid of her boy than of all the world beside : had some one come to tell her that an accident had happened, that he had broken an arm or a leg, it seemed to her that she would have been glad : anything rather than let him know. And yet he would have to know. The eldest son, a man grown, after his father the head of his family, the one who would have to take care of the children. How would it be possible to keep this from him ? And how could it be told ? His mother, who had prided herself on her son's spotless youth, and rejoiced in the thought that a wanton word was as impossible from the lips of Horace as from those of Milly, reddened and felt her very heart burn with shame. How could she tell him ? She could not tell him. It was impossible ; it was beyond her power.

And then she shrank into the corner of her seat and held her breath : for who could this be but Horace, with a foot that scarcely seemed to touch the ground, rushing with an anxious heart to hear news of his father, up the echoing empty stair ?

CHAPTER VII.

EXPLANATION.

'MOTHER ! are you there ? Let me in. Mother ! open the door.'

'In a moment, Horace ; in a moment.' It could not be postponed any longer. She rose up slowly and looked at herself in the glass to see if it was written in her face. She had not taken off her bonnet or made any change in her outdoor dress, and she was very pale, almost ghastly, with all the lines deepened and drawn in her face, looking ten years older, she thought. She put her bonnet straight with a woman's instinct, and then slowly, re-

luctantly, opened the door. He came in eager and impatient, not knowing what to think.

‘Did you want to keep me out, mother? Were you vexed not to find me waiting? And how about papa?’

‘No, Horace, not at all vexed.’

‘I went a little further than I intended. I don’t know my way about. But, mother, what of papa?’

‘Not very much, my dear,’ she said, turning away. ‘It must be nearly time for lunch.’

‘Yes, it is quite time for lunch; and you had no breakfast. I told them to get it ready as I came up. But you don’t answer me. Of course you found him. Is he really ill? What does he mean by it? Why didn’t he come with you? Mother dear, is it anything serious? How pale you are! Oh, you needn’t turn away; you can’t hide anything from me. What is the matter, mamma?’

‘It is serious, and yet it isn’t serious, Horace. He is not ill, which is the most important thing. Only a little—seedy, as you call it. That’s a word, you know, that always exasperates me.’

‘Is that all?’ the youth said, looking at her with incredulous eyes.

She had turned her back upon him, and was standing before the glass, with a pretence of taking off her bonnet. It was easier to speak without looking at him. ‘No, my dear, that is not all. You will think it very strange what I am going to say. Papa and I have had a quarrel, Horace.’

‘Mother!’

‘You may well be startled, but it is true. Our first quarrel,’ she said, turning half round with the ghost of a smile. It was the suggestion of the moment at which she had caught to make up for the impossibility of thinking how she was to do it. ‘They say, you know, that the longer one puts off a thing of this kind the more badly one has it, don’t you know?—measles and other natural complaints. We have been a long time without quarrelling, and now we have done it badly.’ She turned round with a faint smile; but Horace did not smile. He looked at her very gravely, with an astonishment beyond words.

‘I cannot understand,’ he said almost severely, ‘what you can mean.’

‘Well, perhaps it is a little difficult; but still such things do happen. You must not jump at the conclusion that it is all my fault.’

Horace came up to her with his serious face, and put his arm round her, turning her towards him. 'I was not thinking of any fault, mother: but surely I may know more than this? You and he don't quarrel for nothing, and I am not a child. You must tell me. Mother, what is the matter?' he said, with great alarm. For she was overdone in every way, worn out both body and mind, and when she felt her son's arm round her nature gave way. She leant her head upon his young shoulder, and fell into that convulsive sobbing which it is so alarming to bear. It was some time before she could command herself enough to reply,—

'Oh, that is true—that is true! not for nothing. But, dear Horry, you can't be the judge, can you, between your father and mother? Oh no! Leave it a little; only leave it. It will perhaps come right of itself.'

'Mother, of course I can't be the judge; but still, I'm not a child. May I go, then, and see papa?'

'Oh no,' she cried, involuntarily clasping his arm tight—'oh no! not for the world.'

The youth grew very grave; he withdrew his arm from her almost unconsciously, and said, 'Either it is a great deal more serious than you say, or else——'

'It is very serious, Horace. I don't deceive you,' she said. 'It may come to *that*—that we shall never—be together any more. But still I implore you, don't go to your father—oh! not now, my dear. He would not wish it. You must give me your word not to go.'

She could not bear the scrutiny of his eyes. She turned and went away from him, putting off her light cloak, pulling open drawers as if in a search for something; but he stood where she had left him, full of perplexity and trouble. A quarrel between his parents was incredible to Horace; and the idea of a rupture, a public scandal, a thing that could be talked about! He stood still, overwhelmed by sudden trouble and distress, though without the slightest guess of the real tragedy. 'I can't think what you could quarrel about,' he said. 'It seems a mere impossibility. Whatever it is, you must make it up, mother, for our sakes.'

'My dear, anything that can be done, you may be sure will be done, for your sakes.'

'But it is impossible, you know. A quarrel! between you and papa! It is out of the question. Nobody would believe it. I think you must be joking all the time,' he said, with an abrupt

laugh. But his laugh seemed so strange, even to himself, that he became silent suddenly with a look of confusion and irritation. Never in his life had he met with anything so extraordinary before.

'I am not joking,' she said; 'but, perhaps, after a while——. Come and have your luncheon, Horace. I know you want it. And perhaps after a time——'

'You are worn out too, mother; that is what it is. One feels irritable when one is tired. After you have eaten something and rested yourself, let me go to papa. And we'll have a jolly dinner together and make it all up.'

And she had the heroism to say no more, but went down with him, and pretended to eat, and saw him make a hearty meal. While she sat thus smiling at her boy, she could not but wonder to herself what *he* was doing. Was he smiling too, keeping up a cheerful face for the sake of the unfortunate girl not much older than Horace? God help her whom he had destroyed! She kept imagining that other scene while she enacted her own. Afterwards she persuaded Horace with some difficulty to let everything stand over till next day, telling him that she had great need of rest (which was true enough) and would lie down; and that next evening would be time enough for any further steps. She insisted so upon her need of rest, that he remembered that Dick Fareham had asked him to dine with him at his club, and go to the theatre if he had nothing better to do—a plan which she caught at eagerly.

'But how can I go and leave you alone in a hotel?' he said.

'My dear, I am going to bed,' she replied, which was unanswerable. And after many attempts to know more, and many requests to be allowed to go to his father, Horace at last yielded, dressed, and went off to the early dinner which precedes a play. He had brought his dress clothes with him, though there had been so little time for feasting, confident that even a few days in London must bring pleasure of some kind. And already the utterly absurd suggestion that his father and mother could have had a deadly quarrel began to lose its power in his mind. It was impossible. His mother was worn out, and had been irritable; and his father, especially when he had a touch of gout, was, as Horace well knew, irritable also. To-morrow all that would have blown away, and they would both be ashamed of themselves. Thus he consoled himself as he went out; and as the youth never had known what family strife or misfortune meant, and in his

heart felt anything of the kind to be impossible, it did not take much to drive that incomprehensible spectre away.

Mrs. Lycett-Landon was at length left alone to deal with it by herself. What was she to do? She had a fire lighted in the blank room, though it was the height of summer, for agitation and misery had made her cold—and sat over it trembling, and trying to collect her thoughts. Oh, if it could be but possible to do nothing, to say no word to any one, to forget the episode of this morning altogether! ‘If I had not known,’ she said to herself, ‘it would have done me no harm.’ This modern Eleanor, who had fallen so innocently into Rosamond’s bower, had no thought of vengeance in her heart. She had no wish to kill or injure the unhappy girl who had come between her and her husband. What good would that do? Were Rosamond made an end of in a moment, how would it change the fact? What could ever alter that? The ancients did not take this view of the subject. They took it for granted that when the intruder was removed life went on again in the same lines, and that nothing was irremediable. But to Mrs. Lycett-Landon life could never go on again. It had all come to a humiliating close; confusion had taken the place of order, and all that had been, as well as all that was to be, had grown suddenly impossible. Had she not stopped herself with an effort, her troubled mind would have begun again that painful refrain which had filled her mind in the morning, which was perhaps better than the chaos which now reigned there. So far as he was concerned she could still wonder and question, but for herself everything was shattered. She could neither identify what was past nor face what was to come. Everything surged wildly about her, and she found no footing. What was to be done? These words intensify all the miseries of life—they make death more terrible, since it so often means the destruction of all settled life for the living, as well as the end of mortal troubles for the dead—they have to be asked at moments when the answer is impossible. This woman could find no reply as she sat miserable over her fire. She was not suffering the tortures of jealousy, nor driven frantic with the thought that all the tenderness which ever was hers was transferred to another. Perhaps her sober age delivered her from such reflections; they found no place at all in the tumult of her thoughts: the questions involved to her were wholly different: what she was to do; how she was to satisfy her children without shaming their youth and her own

mature purity of matronhood which had protected them from any suggestion of such evil? How they were ever to be silenced and contented without overthrowing for ever in their minds their father and the respect they owed him? This was the treble problem which was before her—by degrees the all-absorbing one which banished every other from her thoughts. What could she say to Horace and Milly? How were they to be kept from this shame? Had they been both boys or both girls, it seemed to their mother that the question would have been less terrible; but boy and girl, young man and young woman, how were they ever to be told? How were they to be deceived and not told? Their mother's powers gave way and all her strength in face of this question. How was she to do it? How was she to refrain from doing it? That pretext of a quarrel, how was it to be kept up? and in what other way—in what other way, oh heaven! was she to explain to them that their father and she could meet under the same roof no more? She covered her face with her hands, and wept in the anguish of helplessness and incapacity; then dried her eyes, and tried again to plan what she could do. Oh that she had the wings of a dove, that she might flee away and be at rest! but whither could she flee? She thought of pretending some sudden loss of money, some failure of fortune, and rushing away with the children to America, to Australia, to the end of the world; but if she did so, what then? would it become less necessary, more easy to explain? Alas! no; nothing could change that horrible necessity. The best thing of all, she said to herself, if she were equal to it, would be to return home, to live there as long as it was possible, with her heart shut up, holding her peace, saying nothing—as long as it was possible! until circumstances should force upon her the explanation which would have to be made. Let it be put off for weeks, for months, even for years, it would have to be made at last.

Thus she sat pondering, turning over everything, considering and rejecting a thousand plans; and then, after all, acted upon a sudden impulse, a sudden rising in her of intolerable loneliness and insufficiency. She felt as if her brain were giving way, her mind becoming blank before this terrible emergency which must be decided upon at once. Horace was safe for a few hours, separated from all danger, but how to meet his anxious face in the light of another day his mother did not know. She sprang up from her seat, and reached towards the table on which there were pens and ink, and wrote a telegram quickly, eagerly, without pausing to think. The

young ones were in the habit of laughing at old Fareham. She herself had joined in the laugh before now, and allowed that he was methodical and tedious and tiresome. He was all these, and yet he was an old friend, the oldest friend she had, one who had known her father, who had seen her married, who had guided her husband's first steps in the way of business. He was the only person to whom she could say anything. And he was a merciful old man: when troubles arose—when clerks went wrong, or debtors failed, Mr. Fareham's opinion was always on the side of mercy. This was one of the reasons why they called him an old fogey in the office; always, always he had been merciful. And it was this now which came into her mind. She wrote her telegram hastily, and sent it off at once, lest she should repent, directing it not to the office, where it might be opened by some other hand than his, but to his house. 'Come to me directly if you can. I have great need of your advice and help. Tell no one,' was what she said. She liked, like all women, to get the full good of the permitted space.

CHAPTER VIII.

EXPEDIENTS.

HIS mother was in bed and asleep when Horace returned from his play—or at least so he thought. He opened her door and found the room dark, and said, 'Are you asleep, mamma?' and got no answer, which he thought rather strange, as she was such a light sleeper. But, to be sure, last night had been so disturbed, she had not slept at all, and the day had been fatiguing and exciting. No doubt she was very tired. He retired on tiptoe, making, as was natural, far more noise than when he had come in without any precaution at all. But she made no sign; he did not wake her, where she lay, very still, with her eyes closed in the dark, holding her very breath that he might not suspect. Horace had enjoyed his evening. The play had been amusing, the dinner good. Dick Fareham, indeed, had asked a few questions.

'I suppose you found the governor all right?' he said.

'I didn't,' said Horace; 'the mother did.'

'And he's all right, I hope?'

'I can't tell you,' said Horace shortly; 'I said I hadn't seen him.'

The conversation had ended thus for the moment, but young Fareham was too curious to leave it so. He asked Horace when he was coming to the London office. 'I know I'm only a warming-pan,' he said, 'keeping the place warm for you. I suppose that will be settled while you are here.'

'I don't know anything about it,' said Horace. 'We heard you were all at sixes and sevens in the office.'

'I at sixes and sevens!'

'Oh, I don't mean to be disagreeable. We heard so,' said Horace, 'and that the governor had his hands full.'

'I'd like to know who told you that,' said the young man. 'I'd like to punch his head, whoever said it. In the first place, it is not true, and your father is not the man to put such a story about.'

Now Horace had not been told this as the reason of his father's absence, but had found it out, as members of a family find out what has been talked of in the house, the persons in the secret falling off their guard as time goes on. He was angry at the resentment with which he was met, but a little at a loss for a reply.

'Perhaps you think I have put it about?' he said, indignant. 'It has not been put about at all, but we heard it somehow. That was why my father——'

'I think I can see how it was—I think I can understand,' said young Fareham. 'That was what called your father up to London. By Jove!'

And after that he was not so pleasant a companion for the rest of the evening. But the play was amusing, and Horace partially forgot this *contretemps*. When he found his mother's room shut up and quiet, he went to his own without any burden on his mind. He was not so anxious about 'the governor' as perhaps Milly in his place might have been. It was highly unpleasant that the mother and he should have quarrelled, and quite incomprehensible. But Horace went to bed philosophically, and the trouble in his mind was not enough to keep him from sleep.

Young Fareham, on his side, wrote an indignant letter to his uncle, demanding to know if his mind too had been poisoned by false reports. The young man was very angry. He was being made the scapegoat; he was the excuse for old Landon's absence, who had not been near the office for months, and he called upon his own particular patron to vindicate him. Had his private morals

been attacked he might have borne it ; but to talk of the office as at sixes and sevens ! this was more than he could bear.

Next morning, before anybody else was awake, an early housemaid stole into Mrs. Lycett-Landon's room, and told her that a gentleman had arrived who wanted to see her. The poor lady had slept a little towards the morning, and was waked by this message. She thought it must be her husband, and after a moment of dolorous hesitation got up hastily and dressed herself, and went to the sitting-room, which was still in the disorder of last night, and looking, if that were possible, still more wretched, raw, and unhomelike than in its usual trim. She found, with a great shock and sense of discouragement, old Mr. Fareham, pale after his night's journey, with all the wrinkles about his eyes more pronounced, and the slight tremor in his head more visible than ever. He came forward to meet her, holding out both his hands.

'What can I do for you?' he said. 'What has happened? I came off, you see, by the first train.'

'Oh, Mr. Fareham, I never expected this! You must have thought me mad. I think, indeed, I must have been off my head a little last night. I telegraphed, did I?—I scarcely knew what I was doing——'

'You have not found him, then?'

She covered her face with her hands. To meet the old man's eyes in the light of day and tell her story was impossible. Why had not she gone away, buried herself somewhere, and never said a word?

'I have seen Mr. Landon, Mr. Fareham; he is not—ill: but Horace knows nothing,' she said hastily.

'My dear lady, if I am to do anything for you I must know.'

'I don't think there is anything to be done. We have had a—serious disagreement; but Horace knows nothing,' she repeated again. He looked at her, and she could not bear his eyes. 'I am very sorry to have given you so much trouble——'

'The trouble is nothing,' he said. 'I have known you almost all your life. It would be strange if I could not take a little trouble. I think I know what you mean. You were distracted last night, and sent for me. But now in the calm of the morning things do not look so bad, and you think you have been too hasty. I can understand that, if that is what you mean.'

She could not bear his eye. She sank down in the chair where she had sat last night and talked to Horace. *In the calm of the*

morning! It was only now, when she felt that she had begun to live again, that all her problems came back to her, full awake, and fell upon her like harpies. *Things do not look so bad!* There passed through her mind a despairing question, whether she had strength to persuade him that this was so, and that there really was nothing to appeal to him about.

'My dear lady,' he said again, 'you must be frank with me. Is it a false alarm, and nothing for me to do? If so, not another word; I will forget that you ever sent for me. But if there is something more——'

How much was going through her mind, and how many scenes were rising before her eyes as he spoke! There appeared to her a vision of duty terrible to perform; of going home, putting on a face of calm, speaking of papa as usual to the children, living her life as usual, keeping her secret: and then of the universal questions that would arise, Where was he? what had become of him? why did he never return? Or she seemed to see herself going away, making some pretext of health, of education, she could not tell what, carrying her children, astonished, half unwilling, full of questions which she could not answer, away with her into the unknown. These visions rolled upward before her eyes surrounded with mists and confusion, out of which they appeared and reappeared. When her old friend stopped speaking her imagination stopped too, and she came to a pause. And then the impossibility of all these efforts came over her and overwhelmed her—the mists, the clouds, the chaos of helplessness and confusion in which there was no standing-ground, nor anything to grasp at, swallowing her up. She did not know how long she sat silent while the old man stood and looked at her. Then she burst forth all at once,—

'I cannot tell the children! How is it possible? Horace and Milly, they are grown up; they will want to know. How can I tell them? I want you to help me to keep it from them—to think of something. I would rather die than tell them,' she said, starting up wringing her hands.

'My dear lady! my dear lady!——'

'Mr. Fareham, Robert—has married—again!'

The old man gave a loud cry—almost a shriek—of surprise and horror. 'You don't know what you are saying,' he said.

'That sounds as if I were dead,' she said, calmed by the revelation, with a faint smile. 'Oh yes, I know very well what I am

saying. He is married—as if I were dead—as if I had never existed. I went to see him, and I saw—her!’

Old Fareham caught her hands in his; he led her to her seat again, and put her in it, uttering all the time sounds that were half soothing, half blaspheming. He stood by her, patting her on the shoulder, his old eyebrows contracted, his lips quivering under their heavy grey moustache. He was more agitated now than she was. The telling of her secret seemed to have delivered her soul. When he had recovered himself he asked a hundred questions, to all which she answered calmly enough. The room, with its look of disorder—the litter of last night, the fresh morning sunshine streaming in disregarded, emphasising the squalor of the ashes in the grate—surrounded with a fitting background the strange discussion between these two—the old man fatigued with his night journey, the woman pale as a ghost, with eyes incapable of sleep. She told him everything, forestalling his half-said protest that it must be another Lycett-Landon with the fact of her personal encounter with her husband, forgetting nothing. The facts of the case had by this time paled of their first importance to her eyes, while they were everything to his. They no longer agitated her; while that which convulsed her very soul seemed to him of but little importance. ‘I cannot tell the children. How am I to tell the children?’ He became weary of this refrain.

‘We can think of the children later. In the meantime, this other is the important question. He has brought himself within the range of the law; you can punish him.’

‘Punish him?’ she said, with a strange smile—‘punish him?’

‘Yes; you may forgive if you please, but I can’t forgive. He deserves to be punished, and he shall be punished—and the woman—’

‘He said she was as innocent—as I am.’

‘He said! he is a famous authority. One knows what kind of creature—’

‘I have seen her,’ said Queen Eleanor, with a sigh, ‘poor child. He said nothing but the truth; she is not in fault. She is the one who is most injured. I would save her if I could.’

‘Save her! You would let this sweet establishment go on,’ he said, with fine sarcasm, ‘and not disturb them?’

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘It may be wrong, but I think I would if I could.’

'You are mad!' cried the old man. 'You have lost all your good sense, and your feeling too. What, your own husband! you would let him go on living in sin—happy——'

She stopped him with a curious kind of authority—a look before which he paused in spite of himself.

'Happy!' she said; 'I suppose so; at fifty, after living honestly all these years!'

He stopped and shook his grey head. 'I have known such a thing before. It seems as if they must break out—as if common life and duty became insupportable. I have known such a case once before.'

She cried out eagerly, 'Who was it?' then stopped with a half-smile. 'What does it matter to me who it was? The only thing that matters now is the children. What is to be done about the children? I cannot tell them; nor can you, nor any one. Mr. Fareham, let him alone; let him be—happy, as you call it—if he can. But the children—what am I to say to the children?' She rose up again, and began to walk about the room, unable to keep still. 'Horace, who is a man, and Milly. If they were little things it would not matter; they would not understand.'

'And is it possible,' said old Fareham, looking at her almost sourly, 'that this is the only thing you can think of?—not your own wrongs, nor his abominable behaviour, nor——'

She paused a little, standing by the table. 'Oh, you do wrong,' she said, 'you do wrong! A woman has her pride. If his duty has become—insupportable; it was you who used the word—and life insupportable, do you think a woman like me would hold him to it? Oh, you do wrong! I have put that away. But the children—I cannot put them away! And he was a good father, a kind father. Think of something. If only they might never find out!'

Here her voice gave way, and she could say no more.

'Horace will have to know,' he said, shaking his head.

'Why? You could tell him there was some difficulty between us, something that could not be got over. That we were both in the wrong, as people always are in a quarrel. And no doubt I must have been in the wrong, or—or Robert would never have gone so far—so far astray. No doubt I have been wrong; you must have seen it—you with your experience—and yet you never said a word. Why didn't you tell me? you might have

done it so easily. Why didn't you say, "You make life too humdrum, too commonplace for him. He wants variety and change?" I would have taken it very well from you. I am not a woman who will not take advice. Why did you never tell me? I could have made so many changes if I had known.'

He took her hand again, with a great pity, and almost remorse, in his old face. 'It is too early,' he said, 'to do anything. Tell me where I shall find him, and go back to your room and try to rest. Say you are too tired to see the boy, if that is all you are thinking of: and go to bed—go to bed, and try and get a little sleep. I have a great deal of experience, as you say. Leave it to me. I will see him, and then we will talk it over, and think what is best to be done.'

'You will see—him? What will you say to him, Mr. Fareham? Why should you see him? Is not the chapter closed so far as he is concerned?'

'Closed? He will come home when he is tired of—the other establishment—is that what you mean him to do?'

She blushed like a girl, growing crimson to her hair. 'Oh yes,' she said, 'I know you have a great deal of experience; but, perhaps, here you do not understand. That—that would not be necessary. He is not a man who would—Mr. Fareham, you don't suppose I wish him any harm?'

'You are a great deal too good—too merciful.'

'I am not merciful; it is all ended. Don't you know, since yesterday the world has come to an end. Life has become impossible—impossible! that is all about it. I am not angry; it is too serious for that. I would not harm him for the world. God help him! I don't know how he can live, any more than I know how I can live. It is—no word will express what it is. But he will not come back. He is not that kind of man.'

'Do you think if you had not seen him yesterday, if he did not know that you had found him out—do you think,' said old Fareham deliberately, 'that he would not have come back?'

She looked at him for an instant, and then hid her face in her hands.

'I have no doubt on the subject,' said the old man triumphantly. 'But when a man has put himself within the reach of the law he is powerless, and we have him in our hands.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE REVELATION.

SHE woke suddenly with the sense that somebody was by her, and found Horace seated by her bed. She had fallen asleep in the brightness of the morning, overcome with fatigue, and also partly calmed by having confided her secret to another: even when it is painful, when it is indiscreet, it is always a relief. The bosom is no longer bursting with that which it is beyond its power to contain. She woke suddenly with that sense of some one looking at her which breaks the deepest sleep. She was still in her dressing-gown, lying upon her bed. 'Horace!' she said, springing up.

'I am so glad you have had a sleep. Don't jump up like that; you look so tired, mother, so worn out.'

'Not now, my dear; I feel quite fresh now. Did you enjoy your evening?'

'What does it matter about my evening?' he said, almost sternly. 'Mother, do you know that old Fareham came up by the night train?'

'Yes, Horace,' she said, turning her head away.

'You knew? Do you think you are treating me fairly—I that am more interested than any one? What is the matter? The business has gone wrong. Do you mean to say that my father—*my father*——'

Poor Horace's voice faltered. That it should be *his* father was the extraordinary thing, as it always is full of mystery to us how misfortune, much less shame, should affect us individually. He looked at his mother with a look which was imperative and almost commanding, not perplexed and imploring, as it had been before. Mr. Fareham's arrival had thrown light, as Horace thought, on the mystery, light which to him, as a young man destined to be a merchant prince, and to convey to the world higher ideas of commerce altogether, was more dreadful than anything else could have been. He thought he saw it all; and that as no one would be so deeply affected as he, his mother had been weakly trying to hide it from him. Horace felt that his spirit would rise with disaster, and that he was capable of raising the house again and all its concerns from the ground.

And for a moment she caught at this new idea. To her own feminine mind disaster to the business was as nothing in com-

parison with what had happened. If others could make him believe this, it would be a way out of the worse revelation. This was how she contemplated the matter. She said, 'It was I who sent for Mr. Fareham. He is a very old friend, and his interests are all bound up with ours.'

'Then that is what it is. He has been speculating. Oh, how could you conceal such a thing from me? How could you keep me in the dark? Mother, I don't mean to be unkind, but this is nothing to you in comparison with what it is to me. You don't care for a man's credit,' said Horace, rising and striding about the room, 'or the reputation of the firm, or anything of real importance, in comparison with his health or his comfort or some personal matter. His health—of what consequence is that in comparison? Mother, mother, I shall find it hard to forgive you if you have let our credit be put in danger without warning *me*.'

This reproach was one that she had not looked for, and that took her entirely by surprise. She looked up at him, still feeling that what there was to say was worse, far worse than anything he could imagine, yet startled and confused by his vehemence. 'I—I—don't think the credit of the house will suffer,' she said, faltering a little.

'It is not so bad as that? But then why did you send for old Fareham? You ought to have taken no step without consulting me. I understand this sort of thing better than you do,' he said, with an impatience which he could not suppress. 'Mamma, I beg your pardon; everything else I am sure you know better—but the business! Don't you know I have been brought up to that? I mind nothing so much as the credit of the house.'

'Nothing, Horace?' she said faintly.

'Nothing,' he repeated with vehemence, 'nothing!' Of course, he added after a moment, 'if papa were ill I should be very sorry: but he must not play with our credit, mother; he must not; that is the one thing. What has he been doing? Surely not anything to do with those new bubble companies?'

'Oh, Horace, how can I tell you? Wait till Mr. Fareham comes back.'

'He has gone to see papa, then? I thought it must be that; but why, why not tell me? I am not very old, perhaps, but I know about the business, and care more for it than any one else. I would make any sacrifice, but our credit must not be touched; it must not be touched.'

‘Compose yourself, Horace ; it need not be touched, so far as I can see.’

This calmed him a little, and he sat down by her, and took pains to explain his views to her. ‘You see, mamma,’ he said kindly, but with a little natural condescension, ‘ladies have such a different way of looking at things. You think of health and comfort and good temper, and all that, when a man thinks of his affairs and his reputation. You would be more distracted if the governor’ (at home Horace never ventured on this phrase, but it suited the atmosphere of town) ‘had a bad accident, or got into a snappish state, than if he had pledged the credit of the firm. It is nice in you to think so, but it would be silly in a man.’

‘You think then, Horace, that nothing can be so bad as trouble to the firm. You think that loss of money——’

‘Loss of money is not everything,’ he said testily. ‘I hope Lyceet-Landon’s could lose a lot of money without being much the worse. The fact is, you don’t understand. It is always the personal you dwell upon. I am not reproaching you, mamma ; it is your nature.’ He patted her hand as he said this, and looked at her with a half-smile of boyish wisdom and superiority, very kindly compassionating her limited powers.

This silenced her once more : and so they remained for some time, he sitting thoughtfully by her, she reclining on the bed looking at him, trying to read the meaning in his face. At last she said tremulously, ‘I am not quite so bad as you think : but perhaps a matter that touched our family peace, that sundered us from each other—disunited us——’

He kept on patting her hand, but more impatiently than before. ‘Nothing could do that—permanently,’ he said. And he asked no more questions. He was a little, a very little, contemptuous of his mother. ‘I ought to have gone along with old Fareham. We should have talked it over together. I suppose now I must have patience till he comes back. When do you think he will come back ? Can’t I go and join him there ? Oh, you think papa wouldn’t like it ? Well, perhaps he might not. It is rather hard upon me, all the same, to wait on and know nothing.’

‘Don’t you think if you were to take a walk, Horace, or go and see the pictures——’

‘Oh, the pictures ! in this state of anxiety ? Well, yes, I think I will take a walk ; it is better than staying indoors. And don’t you make yourself unhappy, mother. It can’t have been going on very long, and no doubt we shall pull through.’

Saying this with a cloudy smile, Horace went away, waving his hand to her as he went out. She then got up and dressed with a stupefied sensation, taking all the usual pains about her toilette, though with a sense that it was absolutely unimportant. She could not remember what day it was, or what month, or even what year. She was conscious of having received a remorseless and crushing blow, but that was all; when she had left home or whether she would ever go back to it, she could not tell; neither could she form the least idea of what was going to happen when old Mr. Fareham came back. She forgot that she had not breakfasted, and even, what was more wonderful, that to save appearances it was necessary to make believe to breakfast. Everything of the kind was swept away. She went into the sitting-room and sat down at the window like an abstract woman in a picture. It was very strange to her to do nothing; and yet she never thought of doing anything, but sat down and waited—waited for something that was about to happen, not knowing what it might be.

She had not waited long when one of the hotel servants knocked at the door, and, opening it, admitted a stranger whom she had never seen before—a small, thin woman in a widow's dress, who stood hesitating, looking at her with a pair of anxious eyes, and for the first moment said nothing. Mrs. Lycett-Landon was roused by the unlooked-for appearance of this visitor. She rose up, wondering, at such a moment, who it was that could have come to disturb her. The stranger was very timid and shy. She hung about the door as if there were a protection in being near it.

'I beg your pardon,' she said, 'I don't even know by what name to speak to you. But one of my daughter's maids saw you yesterday get into a cab, and then we heard you had come here.'

'I think I understand; your daughter is——'

'Mrs. Landon, madam, where you called yesterday. You asked for me, and then went away without seeing me. I could not help feeling anxious. You may think it presuming in me to track you out like this, but I do feel anxious. We were afraid perhaps that my son-in-law——'

She had a wistful, deprecating look, like that of a woman who had not received much consideration in the course of her life. She watched the face of the person she addressed with an anxiety which evidently was habitual, as if to see how far she might go, to avoid all possible offence. Mrs. Lycett-Landon returned the look with one which was full of alarm, almost terror. It seemed impossible

that she could get through this interview without revealing everything; and the small, anxious, hesitating figure looked so little able to bear any shock.

‘Will you sit down?’ she said, offering her a chair.

The stranger accepted it gratefully with a timid smile of thanks. She seemed to take this little civility as a good omen, and brightened perceptibly. She was very carefully, neatly dressed, but her crape was somewhat rusty, and the black gown evidently taken much care of. She twisted her hands together nervously.

‘We were afraid,’ she repeated, ‘that perhaps Mr. Landon—had got himself into trouble with his own family because of his marriage: and that you had come perhaps—to see. We were so delighted that you should have come; and then when we found you had gone away—’

Her voice trembled a little as she spoke. She watched every movement of the face which regarded her with such strange emotion, ready to stop, to modify any word that displeased.

‘Then did you let him—did you give him your daughter—without any inquiries, without knowing anything—’

‘Oh, madam,’ the widow cried, clasping and unclasping her nervous hands, ‘perhaps I was imprudent. But at his age one does not think of the family approving. If he had been a younger man—. But who could have any right to interfere at his age?’

‘That is true—that is very true!’

‘And you see it came upon me, you might say, unexpectedly. I saw that he was getting fond of Rose; but I never thought, if you will excuse me for saying so, that she would marry a gentleman so much older—and then it was so sudden at the last. He had leave from his office, and the opportunity of getting away—’

‘Leave from his office!’ The listener could not help repeating this with a curious cry of indignation. It gave her a shock, in the midst of so many shocks. As for the widow, this interruption confused her. She trembled and stumbled in her simple tale.

‘And so—and so—it was settled at last in a hurry. I have not very strong health, and I was very glad that Rose should be settled. Oh yes, I was glad that she should have some one to take care of her in case anything happened. I had confidence that you could feel for me as a mother; perhaps you are a mother yourself.’

The widow stopped short when she had made this suggestion, with a momentary panic; for Rose’s idea had been that the lady

who had appeared and disappeared so suddenly was a sister, perhaps a maiden sister. Her mother judged otherwise, but then paused, afraid.

‘Yes, I am a mother myself.’

‘I thought so—I thought so! and I felt sure you would feel for me as a mother. It was Rose I had to think of. As for his family, at his age, you will understand——. But it makes my poor girl very unhappy to think she may have been the means of separating him from his relations. I tell her a wife is more to a man than any other relation. But still, if it could be possible to make a reconciliation—if you would be so kind as to help us——’

The nervous hands clasped together; the little hesitating woman looked with a face full of prayer and entreaty at the lady who sat there before her, like an arbiter of fate. If she could have known how the heart was beating in that lady’s breast! Mrs. Lycett-Landon did not speak for some time, not being able to command her voice. Then she said, tremulously, but with a great effort to be calm,—

‘You don’t know what you ask. I am the last person——’

‘Oh, madam!’

She had an old-fashioned, over-respectful way of using this word. And there was no fear or suspicion of the truth, though much anxiety, in her eyes.

‘Oh, madam! you have a kind face; and who should be the one to make peace but such as you, that can feel for a young creature, and knows what is in a mother’s heart?’

The words were scarcely out of her lips when Horace entered hastily, asking, before he saw that any stranger was present,—

‘Mother, has Fareham come back?’

‘No, Horace; but you see I am engaged.’

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said, surprised by the look of agitation in the stranger’s face. But he was terribly excited. ‘I won’t stay a moment; but do please tell me papa’s address. I cannot wait and knock about all day. Old Fareham is so tedious; he will take hours about it. Tell me my father’s address.’

Horace was not without wiles of his own. He thought it more likely that he should extract this address when somebody was there.

‘Horace, I am engaged, as you can see.’

‘Only a moment, mother; it was something flowery—Laburnum, or Acacia, or something. If I go to the office I can get it in a moment.’

The little widow rose up; something strange and terrible came over her face.

'Young gentleman,' she said, 'are you any relation to Mr. Lycett-Landon? you will tell me if no one else will.'

'Relation!' said Horace, with a laugh, 'oh yes; only his son, that is all!'

'And this lady? This lady is——'

'My mother; who else should she be?' the youth said.

There was a moment during which the two women stood gazing at each other in an awful suspension of all sound or thought. And then the visitor uttered a great and terrible cry, and fell down at their feet upon the floor.

CHAPTER X.

THE END.

THE Lycett-Landons went home to the Grove that night. Horace asked his mother no questions. He helped her to lift up and place upon a sofa the visitor whose strength had failed her so strangely; but how much he heard from Mr. Fareham, or how much he guessed, she never knew. He was anxious to go home at once, and, instead of making any objections as she had feared, facilitated everything. He was very kind and tender to her on the journey, taking care of her and of her comfort, saving her from every trouble. This had not heretofore been Horace's way. He was still so young that the habit of being taken care of was more natural to him than that of taking care of others: but he had learned a new version apparently of his duty on that strange and agitating day. It was late when they reached the Mersey again, and the great river was full of shooting fireflies, little steamers with their sparks of glowing colour flitting and rustling to and fro among the steady lights of the moored ships. The sky was pale with the rising moon, the stars appearing languidly out of the clouds. As they crossed the river to their home, sitting close together on the deck, saying nothing to each other, avoiding in the darkness all contact with the other passengers, two or three little steamboats rustled past, full of music and a crowd of merry-makers going home noisy and happy after a day's pleasure. The sky was stained all round the horizon behind them by the smoke of the great town, but before them was soft and clear with fringes of dark

foliage and outlines of peaceful houses rising against it. Everything was full of quiet and peace, no false or discordant note anywhere; even the fiddles and flutes of the bands harmonised by the air and water and magical space about, and the dew dropping, and the moon rising. It was only forty-eight hours since they had left their home almost under the same conditions, but what a change there was!

Milly was full of questions and surmises. How was papa? Why did they leave him? When was he coming home? Why did they return so soon? She supposed the season was over, and nothing going on, not even the theatres. She never thought it possible they would come back directly. She poured a flood of remarks upon them as they walked from the boat to the house. Fortunately it was dark, and their faces gave her no information; but their brief replies, and a something indefinable, a restraint in the atmosphere about them, a something new which she did not understand, began to affect the girl after the first abandon of her surprise and her interrogations. As soon as Mrs. Lycett-Landon entered the house she announced that she was very tired and going to bed. 'I am growing old; travelling affects me as it never used to do, and I have got a headache. I shall go to bed at once, Milly. No, I don't want anything to eat; quiet and rest—that is all I want. Give Horace his supper, dear; and you need not come into my room to-night. I shall put out my light and get to sleep.'

'Not even a cup of tea, mamma? Mayn't I come and help you to take off your things? Let me send White away, and undress you myself.'

'I want no one, my darling, neither you nor White. My head aches. I want darkness and quiet. Good night. To-morrow morning I shall be all right.'

She kissed them, her veil still hanging over her face, and hurried upstairs. Milly watched her till she had disappeared, and then turned upon her brother. 'What does this mean?' said the girl; 'what has happened to mamma, and where's papa, Horry? Tell me this very moment, before you have your supper or anything. I know something must be wrong.'

'Something is wrong,' said Horace, 'but I can't tell you what it is. I don't know what it is. Now, Milly, that is all I am going to say. You need not go on asking and asking, for you will only make me miserable. I can't tell you anything more.'

'You can't tell me anything more?' She was struck, not dumb indeed with amazement, but into such a quiver and agitation that she could scarcely speak. Then she regained her courage a little. 'Where's papa? He can't be ill, or you would not have come home.'

'I have not seen him,' said Horace, doggedly.

'You have not seen him?'

'Mother did, and then old Fareham. I can tell you this: it isn't speculation, or anything of that sort. The firm is all right. It's nothing about that.'

'The firm—speculation!' cried Milly, with wild contempt; 'who cares for business? What is the matter? and why doesn't he come home?'

'Who cares for it? I care for it. I thought at first that was what had happened; but we may make our minds quite easy; it's not that.' Horace was really comforted by this certainty, though not perhaps so much as he pretended to be. 'I was very much frightened at first,' he said. 'It was a great relief to find that, whatever it is, it is not that.'

Milly stood looking at him with scared eyes. 'Do you mean to say that papa is not coming home? Oh, Horry, for goodness' sake tell me something more. Has he done anything? What has he done? Papa! It is impossible, impossible!' the girl cried.

'So I should have said too,' said Horace, who had now had a long time in which to accustom himself to the idea. 'Perhaps the mother will tell you something; she has not said a word to me. I don't know, and therefore I can't tell you. It has been a horrid sort of day,' said the lad, 'and perhaps you'll think it unfeeling, Milly, but I'm hungry. I'd like to have something to eat, and then I'd like to go to bed. I'm horribly tired, too; wandering about, and always waiting to hear something and never hearing, and imagining all sorts of things, is very fatiguing, and I don't think I've eaten anything to-day.'

Milly despised her brother for thinking of eating, but yet it was a relief to superintend his supper and get him all he wanted. They had a great deal of talk over this strange meal, and though Horace gave his sister no information, they yet managed to assure themselves somehow that a terrible catastrophe had happened, and that their father had gone out of their lives. Milly wept bitterly over it, and even Horace could not keep the tears from his eyes; but somehow they recognised the fact between

them, far more easily than their mother above stairs or any bystander could have imagined possible. Two days ago what could have been more impossible to them? And Milly did not know even so much as Horace knew, nor had any insight at all into how it was; and yet she too in the course of an hour or so had accepted the fact. To youth there is something convincing in certainty, an obedience to what is, which is one of the most remarkable things in life. They acknowledged the mystery with wonder and pain, but they did not rebel or doubt. Their mother thought nothing less than that they would struggle, would be incredulous, would rebel even against her for their father's sake. But there was nothing of all this. They submitted almost without a struggle, though they did not understand.

And then the quiet days closed down upon this family, upon which so mysterious a loss had fallen. It need not be said that there was great discussion as to the cause of Mr. Lycett-Landon's disappearance, both among the merchants in Liverpool, and among their wives and daughters on the other side of the water. The explanations that were given at first were many and conflicting; and for a long time people continued to ask, 'When do you expect your husband?' or 'your father?' And then there came the time, not less painful, when people pointedly refrained from asking any questions, and changed the subject when his name was mentioned, which was, perhaps, almost less tolerable. Then, gradually, by degrees it became an old story, and people remembered it no more. Ah, yes! they remembered it whenever any incident happened in the family—when Horace took his place as one of the partners in the office, when Milly married—then it all cropped up again, with supposititious details; but when nothing was happening to them the family escaped into obscurity, and their circumstances were discussed no longer. Old Mr. Fareham had a very bad cold after he returned from London, and was for some time confined to the house, and would see nobody. And then other things happened, as they are continually happening in a mercantile community. A great bankruptcy, with many exciting and disgraceful circumstances, followed soon after, and the attention of the community was distracted. The Lycett-Landon business remained a mystery, and after a while the waters closed tranquilly over the spot where this strange shipwreck had been.

Milly never heard till after her marriage what it was that had happened, and at no time did Horace ask any questions; how

much he divined, how much he had been told, his mother never knew. And she herself never was aware how the other story ended: if the poor Rose, her husband's unfortunate young wife, died of it, or if she abandoned him; or if the poor mother lacked the courage to tell her; or if between them the young woman was kept in her poor little suburban paradise deceived. Mrs. Lycett-Landon made many a furtive effort to ascertain how it had ended; but she was too proud to inquire openly, and though she wondered and pondered she never knew.

Years, however, after these events, when Horace had begun to be what he had determined upon being, a merchant-prince, and the house of Lycett-Landon & Co. (old Mr. Fareham being dead, and young Mr. Fareham at the head of the American branch, Landon, Fareham, & Co.) was greater than ever, Mr. Lycett-Landon suddenly appeared at the Grove. He came to make a call in the morning, sending in his name; for the old butler was dead, and the new one did not know him, and he was admitted like any other stranger. His wife even did not know who he was—for she had come down expecting a distant relation—until she had looked a second or third time at the stout, embarrassed old gentleman, looking very awkward and deprecating, who stood up when she came into the room, and shrank with a certain confusion from her inspection. After the first shock of the recognition they sat down and conversed calmly enough. He inquired about the children with a little affectation of ease.

‘I know about Horace, of course,’ he said, ‘and I saw Milly’s marriage in the papers. But I should like to hear a little about the others.’

She accepted his curiosity as very natural, and gave him all the particulars very openly and sedately. He sat for nearly an hour, sometimes asking questions, sometimes listening, with a curious air of politeness, like a man on his best behaviour, in the society of a lady a little above him in station, and with whom his acquaintance was far from intimate, and then took his leave.

With what thoughts their minds were full as they sat there, in the old home equally familiar to both, where every article of furniture, every picture on the walls had the same associations to both! But nothing was said to betray the poignant sensation with which the woman, compunctious, though she had never been revengeful, or the man, so strangely separated and fallen from all that had been habitual to him, beheld each other, sat by each other, after

these years. He smiled, but she had not the strength to smile. After this, however, he came again at intervals, always asking with interest about his children, but not caring to see them.

‘I suppose they don’t remember anything about me,’ he said.

His visits were not frequent, but he became, in the end, acquainted with all the family, and even resumed a certain intercourse with Horace and Milly, his first meeting with whom was accidental and very painful. To see him elderly, stout, and (but perhaps this was one effect of some refinement of jealous and wounded feeling on the part of Mrs. Lycett-Landon) oh so commonplace! and fallen from his natural level, shuffling his feet, reddening, smiling that confused and foolish smile, conciliating his children, gave to his wife almost the keenest pang she had yet suffered. She could not bear to see him so lowered from his natural place. Tragedy is terrible, but when it drops into tragedy, tragi-farce at the end, that is the most terrible of all. Pity, shame, something that was like remorse, though she was blameless, was in his wife’s heart. The impulse in her mind was to go away out of the house that was his, and leave him in possession. But, to do him justice, he never, by look or word, reminded her that the house had been his, or that he was anything but a visitor.

And what was the explanation of the strange passion which made him, at fifty, depart from all the traditions of his virtuous life—whether it was a passion at all, or only some wonderful, terrible gust of impatience, which made duty and the rule of circumstances, and all that he was pledged and bound to, insupportable—she never knew; nor whether he found that this poor game was even for a moment worth the blazing flambeau of revolution which it cost; or whether it cost him still more than that candle—the young life which he had blighted; whether Rose lived or died; or where he came from when he paid these visits to his old home, and disappeared into when they were over: all this Mrs. Lycett-Landon lived in ignorance of, and so, in all probability, will die.

WHIST; RATIONAL AND ARTIFICIAL.

No one thoroughly acquainted with England will deny that Englishmen, beyond all other races, enjoy games of all sorts as recreation, and that of all games, cricket and lawn-tennis as out-door, and whist and billiards as in-door pastimes, are the most popular; the reason of their popularity is due to two conditions, the one that, whilst in all of them great excellence is attainable, in none is it essential to full enjoyment; and the other, that the muscles are not unduly strained in the out-door, nor the brain in the in-door, games. We therefore believe that if these games were so altered in character as to make excellence a *sine quâ non* of enjoyment, or to make play a serious muscular or mental effort according to the nature of the game, their popularity would cease and the first nail be driven in their coffins.

The sound common-sense of Englishmen has hitherto averted this danger, but now, under the guise of developing whist, a most determined attempt is being made to introduce several artificial modes of play, which would so increase the difficulties of correct play and so alter the character of the game as to make it a severe strain on the attention, and utterly spoil it, especially for moderate players, as a recreation.

That our readers may judge for themselves how far we are justified in raising alarm on these points, we will endeavour to trace the development of whist from its infancy, explain the sources of its fascination for intellectual men, and show how the proposed so-called developments would alter the character of the game.

Lest we should weary our readers by repeating matter already familiar to them, we shall assume them to be conversant with the structure of the game, with the technical terms employed in it, and with some, if not all, of the principal rules of play.

It is generally considered that the first idea of players in the infancy of the game must have been to make tricks as fast as they could, and that they therefore started with leading out aces and other winning cards. When those were exhausted and they could no longer win tricks off the reel, their next idea must have been to lead their lowest cards rather than sacrifice high ones;

and of all leads, that of a single card in the hope of making little trumps, most assuredly was found the most tempting. Gradually, however, the chief disadvantage of leading out winning cards—viz. that it makes the second best cards in the adversaries' hands winning ones—must have been felt so strongly as to put an end to such a crude system, and, where no single card was held, to render it necessary to adopt some other principle; since we may be sure that it would be impossible for players to allow blind chance to decide what card they should lead.

Some time must have elapsed before this new principle was elicited, but gradually, as experience accumulated, those who had the greatest insight into the game must have formed the opinion, which would be generally followed, that the best leads were from high sequences—*i.e.* sequences headed by an honour—as being of all others the least dangerous and the most certain of ultimate benefit. Having reached this point, we ask our readers to form their own opinions as to whether reason does not tell them that if a player led from a sequence headed with king, queen, or knave, he ought to lead the highest so as to prevent his partner with the next highest card wasting it on the same trick. We ask this now, because some of our latter-day prophets say that the play of the highest of a sequence is conventional play—*i.e.* that it is not based on reason, but has been adopted solely by virtue of a prior agreement amongst players for the purpose of giving specific information; yet the veriest tiro who found his partner putting his king on the ten, led from queen, knave, and ten, would see at once that if he had led the queen his partner would not have wasted his king, and for ever thereafter would (unless he wanted the king out of his way) lead the queen; and this he would do for his own sake without troubling himself to persuade other players that thenceforth the highest of a sequence should be led. If, however, players had no sequence to lead from, they must perforce lead the lowest card from some suit—the lowest, because, as it would not be an attempt to win the trick, reason would tell them to play the card of least value to them. But the question from which suit to lead would be most puzzling, and it probably took some time before it was finally admitted that it should be from the strongest. The battle between the lead of a singleton, when weak in trumps, and the lowest of a strong suit was fought gallantly for many a year, and it is only in modern times—say within the last fifty years—that it has ended

conclusively in favour of the latter. It was in 1742, and not until the leads from sequences and from strong suits had established their supremacy, that Hoyle's 'Short Treatise' appeared. We do not suppose that Hoyle *ex animo suo* developed the game as explained by him, but rather that he was the first to bring together and publish the rules of play prevalent amongst the best players.

His book was most successful in diffusing sound ideas amongst the then world of players; and so full and accurate was his comprehension of the game, that there is hardly anything in his treatise which even now can be said to be unsound, whilst there are to be found in it much valuable teaching more or less overlooked by modern writers. We have laid stress on the development of the lead because the proper play of the second, third, and fourth hands depends so entirely on the system adopted for the original lead that, until that had been settled, no sound rules for the play of those hands could be arrived at; but, directly any particular system of leading was adopted, then reason would work out and settle the rules for the play of the other hands. These rules would, even less than the lead, be the result of caprice or of convention, inasmuch as the card or cards already played would give definite data for reason to work on.

Amongst the points which would have thus to be settled and which had been settled by the time Hoyle's treatise appeared, two of the most prominent and difficult must have been—(1) the proper use of trumps, and (2) what card of a sequence should be played when winning or trying to win; and, in reference to the latter point, it is interesting to note how entirely the rule for playing the lowest of a sequence, except when leading, is based on the principle that it is better to avoid deceiving a partner than to deceive partners and adversaries together; for observe, when a player holding ace, king, and queen wins a knave with the ace, he makes every one think that he has not the queen; inasmuch, as it being natural that a trick should be won as cheaply as possible, it follows that if he held the queen he would not have won the knave with the ace unless he also held the king, and as it is eight to one against his holding both king and queen the natural assumption is that he does not hold both, and therefore certainly not the queen; whereas, if he wins the knave with the queen, although he gives no information, he avoids

raising any inference that he has not either ace or king. As in Hoyle's time it had become a rule of play to win with the lowest of a sequence, we know that it had then become a principle of play not to play false or deceiving cards except, of course, for special reasons. The theory and practice of whist as taught by Hoyle have remained unchanged to the present day—that is, for nearly a century and a half—and although in certain details he is not now followed, and play may since his time have improved, the improvement has been principally due to the genius of players seeing, as occasions arose, the advantages of a departure from ordinary rules of play.

It is in connection with this, which has been aptly called the strategy of whist, that Mathews's 'Advice to the Young Whist Player,' which appeared about sixty years after Hoyle's treatise, is such an advance on it. Hoyle gives us the structure, but Mathews relieves the monotony of its uniform lines by showing how, by skilful divergence, a better result can be attained. A modern writer has stated that the principle of playing so as to combine two partners' hands is the peculiar characteristic of modern whist, meaning the whist of the last thirty or forty years; but no one can carefully read Hoyle or Mathews without finding ample proofs that those two writers were as fully impressed as the players of the present day with the necessity of constantly considering their partner's hands as well as their own; although they had not evolved therefrom a rule of always leading from the longest, as distinct from the strongest, suit—a rule which, more frequently than any other, sacrifices a partner's cards without any benefit to the leader, and is in direct opposition to the true principles of combination. Mathews's work had a tremendous success (we have the twentieth edition now before us), and when in the course of time his name lost its charm, his views got a fresh lease of life by being embodied almost word for word in Major A.'s celebrated work, which had a run of nearly twenty editions, and had neither been superseded nor even had a serious rival in the estimation of whist-players till Cavendish, in 1862 or 1863, issued his well-known treatise. To this work as it originally appeared, although far from perfect, too high praise can hardly be given—the author, having imbibed a thorough knowledge of the principles of play, explained them accurately, and so arranged his matter that learners could easily both understand and remember it; and if he had never written another word (but,

alas ! he has), lovers of whist would have been deeply indebted to him. The work is, indeed, too full of details to stimulate readers to feats of skill beyond those actually explained ; but this defect was amply supplied by the well-known treatise by 'J. C.' (James Clay), published in 1864, which bears the same relation to Cavendish's treatise as Mathews's 'Advice' does to that of Hoyle, since, while it omits many details which a beginner should learn, it far excels it in felicity of expression and in that suggestiveness which tends to make a fine player out of a good one. Since then there have appeared some works by Dr. Pole, which in our opinion are so unsound that we never see the advertisement of the 'Whist Triad, by Cavendish, Clay, and Pole' without being reminded of the medical pamphlet, 'What to Eat, Drink, and Avoid' (the substantial, the stimulating, and the unwholesome) : a treatise by R. A. Proctor, which, with some good points, is by no means free from errors ; a skit by Pembridge, called 'Whist, or Bumble-puppy,' depicting most of the weaknesses of whist-players and of whist-play with skill and humour, and in all respects worth reading ; and, lastly, a long treatise by Cavendish, called 'Whist Developments,' which makes us exclaim, 'It were better for whist if Cavendish had never been born !'

It will be seen from this short outline of the natural development of the game that certain rules of play were adopted because it was considered that they, more than any others, tended to trick-making. It is true that in some cases this could not be mathematically proved, whilst in others it could ; but where such proof was wanting the experience of the finest players as to what modes of play were most successful settled the point. The rules of play having been thus elucidated by reason, players were able to draw inferences, more or less certain, from the fall of the cards as to how the unplayed cards were held and to play accordingly, and the exercise thus afforded to the reasoning powers was, and is, the great charm of the game ; if all the hands were exposed this charm would vanish altogether, as it does at Double Dummy. In whist thus developed it suffices to keep the eye on the board, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred to note only the exact value of the high cards played and of such low cards as, when compared with those in a player's hand, give him definite information—*e.g.* so long as a player has noted that his partner or an adversary has in the first two rounds of a suit played two small cards he need not trouble himself as to the exact value of the two ; of course, as

regards the high cards he must be more observant, and as each card falls he must instantaneously draw from it as much information as he can. The attention is not unduly strained by trying to observe and recollect the value of every small card played, and as the play is throughout natural the inferences are natural, and may, barring false play, be relied on; success depends less on the power of observing every card than on the power of drawing correct inferences and of making the best use of them; a player's mind is thus on the alert from the beginning to the end of every hand, but always pleasantly so—there is presented to his mind a succession of interesting problems for him to solve: when he solves them correctly he rejoices in success, and when he fails, he learns something to be useful to him hereafter. Only very moderate powers are requisite to enable a player to observe all that is necessary in whist based purely on reason, and to thoroughly enjoy the game without fear of making a fool of himself through having failed to observe some small card played by partner or adversary which may have been the artificial signal of information. The pleasure of playing is increased rather than diminished by the fact that a player must ever bear in mind that every inference he draws is merely an inference which may be wrong and not a positive fact: thus, when a player wins a knave with an ace, the inference that he holds neither king nor queen may be wrong, as the ace may be a false card; or, suppose a player fourth hand win a ten with an ace and then lead the knave, the natural inference that he has the king and the queen may be wrong, for he may win with the ace and lead out the knave in order to avoid being compelled to lead losing cards which could be won by the adversaries.

Our next task is to show how the so-called modern developments of the game tend with accumulating force to spoil it. These developments may be indifferently denominated 'conventions' or 'signals,' and are methods of giving information not dependent on any natural inferences from the fall of the cards, but on a prior understanding as to their significance. They are increasing in number every day, so that when we give our readers the following list we can only hope that it comprises all. It is possible that there may be a dozen new ones to-morrow.

LIST OF SIGNALS IN USE OR SUGGESTED.

*How made.**Meaning.*

Returning a partner's lead with a small card and subsequently playing a smaller.

That you have no other.

Returning a partner's lead with any card and subsequently playing a higher.

That you have at least one more.

Playing (not leading) a higher card than is necessary—*e.g.* playing a three from three two. (Known as the 'call for trumps'.)

That you have strong trumps and want your partner to lead them.

Playing as above after a partner has done so or has led trumps. (Known as the 'echo of the call'.)

That you have four trumps.

Leading a small card and subsequently playing a smaller. (Known as the 'penultimate'.)

That you have five cards at least in suit led.

Discarding when the strength of trumps is adverse.

That you are strong in the suit which you discard and want your partner to lead it.

Cavendish now proposes to abandon the penultimate, and instead to adopt what are absurdly called 'American leads,' as under:—

Leading originally any card not being an honour or the ten.

That it is your fourth best card in the suit led.

After opening a suit with a high card, going on with one not in sequence with it.

That it is the third best of the suit left in your hand.

Leading on second round the lowest of the two best cards, both being declared in your hand.

That you have at least three more of the suit.

Leading the third best from second and third best has also the same significance; but as there is a good reason for thus playing—viz. the desirability of getting best out of partner's hand—it is not an artificial signal.

In addition to these Cavendish has *invented* another signal which he calls 'the plain-suit echo,' to let his partner know when he holds four cards in the suit opened by partner. It would take too long to explain this fully, but it is important to note that Cavendish himself explains how the plain-suit echo clashes with some of the other signals, and consequently that you must abandon one or the other. We have above emphasised the word 'invented,' because not only does it accurately explain the origin of these signals, but is the very expression used by Clay in reference to them.

The first point to notice as regards all these intimations is the

severe strain on the attention that they absolutely require in order not to miss them. Thus, when our partner returns our suit we must notice the exact value of the card he plays, however small, so as to be able to compare it with the one he subsequently plays. We must note the exact value of every card played by partner and adversaries to know whether, when not leading they are calling for trumps, or when leading they are leading from five ; and still further to gain certain definite information we must, as each trick is played, not merely count the cards played in the suit, but must carefully compare them with our own cards and go through, as far as possible, the entire suit to see whether we cannot tell or form some opinion as to how the remaining cards in it are held, and thus ferret out a penultimate, a call, or an echo of a call. Now, nearly all this, as compared with natural whist, is superfluous, and makes the game much more difficult and mentally laborious ; and whilst no one would complain if it afforded greater scope for the reasoning powers, one feels that all or nearly all the strain falls on the power of attention, which is never pleasant in itself, and as a sign of mental power is not to be mentioned in the same breath as the power of reasoning ; these signals, therefore, tend to give an advantage to an inferior form of mental development, and one hardly to be called intellectual.

Observe next how they alter the character of the game ; so far as they are concerned inferences are superseded, and the effect is exactly the same as if a player had been allowed to express in words the meaning of the signal. Clay, referring to the return to a partner's lead in trumps, says, 'He will very frequently know (that is, even before you have played another card), *as surely as if he looked into your hand*, whether that other trump is held by you or an adversary ;' and again, in reference to the call for trumps, 'he should, as it were, *hear you say to him*,' &c. ; then again, in the case of the American leads, the information as to the value of cards held by the leader when any card above a seven is led, is so definite that his partner can, on the second round, be as sure of the number and quality of cards held as if the leader had told him or shown his cards ; and consequently he knows, as a matter of fact, without any effort of reasoning, whether he can safely play the best card in the suit, retaining a small one so as not to block his partner's suit. Other signals tell him in the same positive way when he must and when he must not lead trumps, and so deprive him of the interest he would feel in solving these

and other problems. Another objection to the signals is that the natural inferences from play cannot be safely drawn, because one can never be sure that either partner or adversary has not begun to play a signal of some sort or other. In this way the game becomes bewildering and harassing, for a player finds himself called on to solve puzzles which cannot possibly be solved by the most accurate reasoning. And what is the excuse for introducing these signals? Simply that they give information! No consideration is given to the question whether they improve or spoil the game. Cavendish's argument in support of them is that the more information a player gives his partner the more successfully they can play their cards. Now this cannot be true of all four players at the table. Both sides cannot simultaneously gain; and if A. and B. get the pull in one hand, their adversaries C. and D. will get the pull in the next. Cavendish admits that they make the game more difficult, but argues that the inability of moderate players to take advantage of them is no reason why those who can should not do so. We personally think that it constitutes a very strong reason. We do not see why a game like whist (usually played for money) should be altered and spoilt for the sole benefit of the best players, and feel that Cavendish's views bring us face to face with the question, Are signals legitimate play? This point has never been thrashed out, and it is quite time it should be. No one will dispute that for players to say, by word of mouth or by finger-signals, what signals say, would be unfair. But we can see no difference between such signals and preconcerted modes of playing the cards to convey the same information. Signals are in no way more legitimate because every one at the table knows their significance than giving the information orally or using finger-signals of which every one knew the meaning, would be; the two things are in principle identical. Let us test the question in this way. Suppose two of our signallers went to a French club, could they honourably use all their signals without first explaining them and intimating that they intended to use them? and suppose our Gallican friends replied, 'That is all very well; but we object to your using them for two reasons—the one that until we have constantly practised them they will give you an advantage, and the other that we consider them in direct contravention of one of the corner-stones of the game—viz. that players shall not by preconcerted signals give their partners any information as to their hands; if, therefore, you insist on using them, we shall

consider it unfair play and act accordingly.' Can any one say the Frenchmen would not be justified in using such language? and if justified, Is it not because signals are essentially improper? Even if within the letter, they are absolutely opposed to the spirit of the established rule of etiquette, which says, 'No intimation whatever, by word or gesture, should be given by a player as to the state of his hand.'

We are by no means peculiar in the opinion that signals and the so-called developments are destroying whist. The number of players who detest them is on the increase; and recently one of the finest players in London, who himself uses the signals, publicly admitted that their tendency was to put an end to the game as a relaxation. Still more recently we read in 'Knowledge,' *à propos* of Cavendish's 'Whist developments': 'A study of it has gone far to convert us to the opinion that whist, as a game, is in a fair way of being ruined. Whist developments are like fungoid growths—the signs and tokens, if not the active tokens, of decay.' 'If these developments are adopted by whist-players generally, then whist will no longer be a game;' and, again: 'It troubles him (Cavendish) little that he is spoiling the game by knocking the brains out of it.' Pembridge, too, in his little work 'The Decline and Fall of Whist,' which every whist-player should read, admirably demonstrates the absurdity of them.

Whilst exposing the dangers now threatening the game, we are not insensible to the difficulty of warding them off. Too many players will be tempted to follow Cavendish's lead under the impression that they will otherwise be left in the lurch; but we consider that that would be putting their heads into the noose. Cavendish's words are: 'It is no reason why better players should be deprived of the advantage of American leads because moderate players may lack the quick perception which would enable them to take advantage of them.' Ye moderate players, bear this in mind and avoid the trap laid for you. You constitute the majority, and if you resolutely decline to play with players who use newfangled signals, they must perforce yield. Remember, you cannot tell if you go on whether you may be led; fresh and fresh signals will be invented, until the game will be so debased as to attract the Knights of Industry. This reminds us that it is Shuffle who, in 'The Humours of Whist,' written after the publication of Hoyle's treatise, says to his brother sharpers, 'I have been working upon a private treatise on Signs

at Whist by way of counter-treatise to his.' Since prevention is better and more easy than cure, decline to play the American leads and every other so-called development which substitutes signs for reason; and ever bear in mind that you play whist for your own recreation and not for the amusement or profit of the better players, and that fault-finding and nagging are not so rare as to need 'developments.'

It is a curious confirmation of the above remarks that since penning them we have read in the whist column of a weekly paper two suggestions; the one, that certain specified play should signify one thing, and the other, by a different contributor, that the same play should signify something quite different. We see from this, that unless players make a determined stand against such absurdities, the day is near when there will be rival systems of signals, some players adopting one and other players others, and the game be turned absolutely topsy-turvey.

M.



THE GOLD WULFRIC.

PART I.

I.

THERE are only two gold coins of Wulfric of Mercia in existence anywhere. One of them is in the British Museum, and the other one is in my possession.

The most terrible incident in the whole course of my career is intimately connected with my first discovery of that gold Wulfric. It is not too much to say that my entire life has been deeply coloured by it, and I shall make no apology therefore for narrating the story in some little detail. I was stopping down at Lichfield for my summer holiday in July 1879, when I happened one day accidentally to meet an old ploughman who told me he had got a lot of coins at home that he had ploughed up on what he called 'the field of battle,' a place I had already recognised as the site of the old Mercian kings' wooden palace.

I went home with him at once in high glee, for I have been a collector of old English gold and silver coinage for several years, and I was in hopes that my friendly ploughman's find might contain something good in the way of Anglo-Saxon pennies or shillings, considering the very promising place in which he had unearthed it.

As it turned out, I was not mistaken. The little hoard, concealed within a rude piece of Anglo-Saxon pottery (now No. 127 in case LIX. at the South Kensington Museum), comprised a large number of common Frankish Merovingian coins (I beg Mr. Freeman's pardon for not calling them Merwings), together with two or three Kentish pennies of some rarity from the mints of Ethelbert at Canterbury and Dover. Amongst these minor treasures, however, my eye at once fell upon a single gold piece, obviously imitated from the imperial Roman aureus of the Pretender Carausius, which I saw immediately must be an almost unique bit of money of the very greatest numismatic interest. I took it up and examined it carefully. A minute's inspection fully satisfied me that it was indeed a genuine mintage of Wulfric of Mercia, the like of which I had never before to my knowledge set eyes upon.

I immediately offered the old man five pounds down for the whole collection. He closed with the offer forthwith in the most contented fashion, and I bought them and paid for them all upon the spot without further parley.

When I got back to my lodgings that evening I could do nothing but look at my gold Wulfric. I was charmed and delighted at the actual possession of so great a treasure, and was burning to take it up at once to the British Museum to see whether even in the national collection they had got another like it. So being by nature of an enthusiastic and impulsive disposition, I determined to go up to town the very next day, and try to track down the history of my Wulfric. 'It'll be a good opportunity,' I said to myself, 'to kill two birds with one stone. Emily's people haven't gone out of town yet. I can call there in the morning, arrange to go to the theatre with them at night, and then drive at once to the Museum and see how much my find is worth.'

Next morning I was off to town by an early train, and before one o'clock I had got to Emily's.

'Why, Harold,' she cried, running down to meet me and kiss me in the passage (for she had seen me get out of my hansom from the drawing-room window), 'how on earth is it that you're up in town to-day? I thought you were down at Lichfield still with your Oxford reading party.'

'So I am,' I answered, 'officially at Lichfield; but I've come up to-day partly to see you, and partly on a piece of business about a new coin I've just got hold of.'

'A coin!' Emily answered, pretending to pout. 'Me and a coin! That's how you link us together mentally, is it? I declare, Harold, I shall be getting jealous of those coins of yours some day, I'm certain. You can't even come up to see me for a day, it seems, unless you've got some matter of a coin as well to bring you to London. Moral: never get engaged to a man with a fancy for collecting coins and medals.'

'Oh, but this is really such a beauty, Emily,' I cried enthusiastically. 'Just look at it, now. Isn't it lovely? Do you notice the inscription—"Wulfric Rex!" I've never yet seen one anywhere else at all like it.'

Emily took it in her hands carelessly. 'I don't see any points about that coin in particular,' she answered in her bantering fashion, 'more than about any other old coin that you'd pick up anywhere.'

That was all we said then about the matter. Subsequent events engrained the very words of that short conversation into the inmost substance of my brain with indelible fidelity. I shall never forget them to my dying moment.

I stopped about an hour altogether at Emily's, had lunch, and arranged that she and her mother should accompany me that evening to the Lyceum. Then I drove off to the British Museum, and asked for leave to examine the Anglo-Saxon coins of the Mercian period.

The superintendent, who knew me well enough by sight and repute as a responsible amateur collector, readily gave me permission to look at a drawerful of the earliest Mercian gold and silver coinage. I had brought one or two numismatic books with me, and I sat down to have a good look at those delightful cases.

After thoroughly examining the entire series and the documentary evidence, I came to the conclusion that there was just one other gold Wulfric in existence besides the one I kept in my pocket, and that was the beautiful and well-preserved example in the case before me. It was described in the last edition of Sir Theophilus Wraxton's 'Northumbrian and Mercian Numismatist' as an absolutely unique gold coin of Wulfric of Mercia, in imitation of the well-known aureus of the false emperor Carausius. I turned to the catalogue to see the price at which it had been purchased by the nation. To my intense surprise I saw it entered at 150*l*.

I was perfectly delighted at my magnificent acquisition.

On comparing the two examples, however, I observed that, though both struck from the same die and apparently at the same mint (to judge by the letter), they differed slightly from one another in two minute accidental particulars. My coin, being of course merely stamped with a hammer and then cut to shape, after the fashion of the time, was rather more closely clipped round the edge than the Museum specimen; and it had also a slight dent on the obverse side, just below the W of Wulfric. In all other respects the two examples were of necessity absolutely identical.

I stood for a long time gazing at the case and examining the two duplicates with the deepest interest, while the Museum keeper (a man of the name of Mactavish, whom I had often seen before on previous visits) walked about within sight, as is

the rule on all such occasions, and kept a sharp look-out that I did not attempt to meddle with any of the remaining coins or cases.

Unfortunately, as it turned out, I had not mentioned to the superintendent my own possession of a duplicate Wulfric; nor had I called Mactavish's attention to the fact that I had pulled a coin of my own for purposes of comparison out of my waistcoat pocket. To say the truth, I was inclined to be a little secretive as yet about my gold Wulfric, because until I had found out all that was known about it I did not want anybody else to be told of my discovery.

At last I had fully satisfied all my curiosity, and was just about to return the Museum Wulfric to its little round compartment in the neat case (having already replaced my own duplicate in my waistcoat pocket), when all at once, I can't say how, I gave a sudden start, and dropped the coin with a jerk unexpectedly upon the floor of the museum.

It rolled away out of sight in a second, and I stood appalled in an agony of distress and terror in the midst of the gallery.

Next moment I had hastily called Mactavish to my side, and got him to lock up the open drawer while we two went down on hands and knees and hunted through the length and breadth of the gallery for the lost Wulfric.

It was absolutely hopeless. Plain sailing as the thing seemed, we could see no trace of the missing coin from one end of the room to the other.

At last I leaned in a cold perspiration against the edge of one of the glass cabinets, and gave it up in despair with a sinking heart. 'It's no use, Mactavish,' I murmured desperately; 'the thing's lost, and we shall never find it.'

Mactavish looked me quietly in the face. 'In that case, sir,' he answered firmly, 'by the rules of the Museum I must call the superintendent.' He put his hand, with no undue violence, but in a strictly official manner, upon my right shoulder. Then he blew a little whistle. 'I'm sorry to be rude to you, sir,' he went on, apologetically, 'but by the rules of the Museum I can't take my hand off you till the superintendent gives me leave to release you.'

Another keeper answered the whistle. 'Send the superintendent,' Mactavish said quietly. 'A coin missing.'

In a minute the superintendent was upon the spot. When

Mactavish told him I had dropped the gold Wulfric of Mercia he shook his head very ominously. 'This is a bad business, Mr. Tait,' he said gloomily. 'A unique coin, as you know, and one of the most valuable in the whole of our large Anglo-Saxon collection.'

'Is there a mouse-hole anywhere,' I cried in agony; 'any place where it might have rolled down and got mislaid or concealed for the moment?'

The superintendent went down instantly on his own hands and knees, pulled up every piece of the cocoa-nut matting with minute deliberation, searched the whole place thoroughly from end to end, but found nothing. He spent nearly an hour on that thorough search; meanwhile, Mactavish never for a moment relaxed his hold upon me.

At last the superintendent desisted from the search as quite hopeless, and approached me very politely.

'I'm extremely sorry, Mr. Tait,' he said in the most courteous possible manner, 'but by the rules of the Museum I am absolutely compelled either to search you for the coin or to give you into custody. It may, you know, have got caught somewhere about your person. No doubt you would prefer, of the two, that I should look in all your pockets and the folds of your clothing.'

The position was terrible. I could stand it no longer.

'Mr. Harbourne,' I said, breaking out once more from head to foot into a cold sweat, 'I must tell you the truth. I have brought a duplicate gold Wulfric here to-day to compare with the Museum specimen, and I have got it this very moment in my waistcoat pocket.'

The superintendent gazed back at me with a mingled look of incredulity and pity.

'My dear sir,' he answered very gently, 'this is altogether a most unfortunate business, but I'm afraid I must ask you to let me look at the duplicate you speak of.'

I took it, trembling, out of my waistcoat pocket and handed it across to him without a word. The superintendent gazed at it for a moment in silence; then, in a tone of the profoundest commiseration, he said slowly, 'Mr. Tait, I grieve to be obliged to contradict you. This is our own specimen of the gold Wulfric!'

The whole Museum whirled round me violently, and before I knew anything more I fainted.

II.

When I came to I found myself seated in the superintendent's room, with a policeman standing quietly in the background.

As soon as I had fully recovered consciousness, the superintendent motioned the policeman out of the room for a while, and then gently forced me to swallow a brandy and soda.

'Mr. Tait,' he said compassionately, after an awkward pause, 'you are a very young man indeed, and, I believe, hitherto of blameless character. Now, I should be very sorry to have to proceed to extremities against you. I know to what lengths, in a moment of weakness, the desire to possess a rare coin will often lead a connoisseur, under stress of exceptional temptation. I have not the slightest doubt in my own mind that you did really accidentally drop this coin; that you went down on your knees honestly intending to find it; that the accident suggested to you the ease with which you might pick it up and proceed to pocket it; that you yielded temporarily to that unfortunate impulse; and that by the time I arrived upon the scene you were already overcome with remorse and horror. I saw as much immediately in your very countenance. Nevertheless, I determined to give you the benefit of the doubt, and I searched over the whole place in the most thorough and conscientious manner. . . . As you know, I found nothing. . . . Mr. Tait, I cannot bear to have to deal harshly with you. I recognise the temptation and the agony of repentance that instantly followed it. Sir, I give you one chance. If you will retract the obviously false story that you just now told me, and confess that the coin I found in your pocket was in fact, as I know it to be, the Museum specimen, I will forthwith dismiss the constable, and will never say another word to any one about the whole matter. I don't want to ruin you, but I can't, of course, be put off with a falsehood. Think the matter carefully over with yourself. Do you or do you not still adhere to that very improbable and incredible story?'

Horried and terror-stricken as I was, I couldn't avoid feeling grateful to the superintendent for the evident kindness with which he was treating me. The tears rose at once into my eyes.

'Mr. Harbourne,' I cried passionately, 'you are very good, very generous. But you quite mistake the whole position. The story I told you was true, every word of it. I bought that gold Wulfrie from a ploughman at Lichfield, and it is not absolutely identical

with the Museum specimen which I dropped upon the floor. It is closer clipped around the edges, and it has a distinct dent upon the obverse side, just below the W of Wulfric.'

The superintendent paused a second, and scanned my face very closely.

'Have you a knife or a file in your pocket?' he asked in a much sterner and more official tone.

'No,' I replied, 'neither—neither.'

'You are sure?'

'Certain.'

'Shall I search you myself, or shall I give you in custody?'

'Search me yourself,' I answered confidently.

He put his hand quietly into my left-hand breast pocket, and to my utter horror and dismay drew forth, what I had up to that moment utterly forgotten, a pair of folding pocket nail-scissors, in a leather case, of course with a little file on either side.

My heart stood still within me.

'That is quite sufficient, Mr. Tait,' the superintendent went on, severely. 'Had you alleged that the Museum coin was smaller than your own imaginary one you might have been able to put in the facts as good evidence. But I see the exact contrary is the case. You have stooped to a disgraceful and unworthy subterfuge. This base deception aggravates your guilt. You have deliberately defaced a valuable specimen in order if possible to destroy its identity.'

What could I say in return? I stammered and hesitated.

'Mr. Harbourne,' I cried piteously, 'the circumstances seem to look terribly against me. But, nevertheless, you are quite mistaken. The missing Wulfric will come to light sooner or later and prove me innocent.'

He walked up and down the room once or twice irresolutely, and then he turned round to me with a very fixed and determined aspect which fairly terrified me.

'Mr. Tait,' he said, 'I am straining every point possible to save you, but you make it very difficult for me by your continued falsehood. I am doing quite wrong in being so lenient to you; I am proposing, in short, to compound a felony. But I cannot bear, without letting you have just one more chance, to give you in charge for a common robbery. I will let you have ten minutes to consider the matter; and I beseech you, I beg of you, I implore you to retract this absurd and despicable lie before it is too late

for ever. Just consider that if you refuse I shall have to hand you over to the constable out there, and that the whole truth must come out in court, and must be blazoned forth to the entire world in every newspaper. The policeman is standing here by the door. I will leave you alone with your own thoughts for ten minutes.'

As he spoke he walked out gravely, and shut the door solemnly behind him. The clock on the chimney-piece pointed with its hands to twenty minutes past three.

It was an awful dilemma. I hardly knew how to act under it. On the one hand, if I admitted for the moment that I had tried to steal the coin, I could avoid all immediate unpleasant circumstances; and as it would be sure to turn up again in cleaning the Museum, I should be able at last to prove my innocence to Mr. Harbourne's complete satisfaction. But, on the other hand, the lie—for it *was* a lie—stuck in my throat; I could not humble myself to say I had committed a mean and dirty action which I loathed with all the force and energy of my nature. No, no! come what would of it, I must stick by the truth, and trust to that to clear up everything.

But if the superintendent really insisted on giving me in charge, how very awkward to have to telegraph about it to Emily! Fancy saying to the girl you are in love with, 'I can't go with you to the theatre this evening, because I have been taken off to gaol on a charge of stealing a valuable coin from the British Museum.' It was too terrible!

Yet, after all, I thought to myself, if the worst comes to the worst, Emily will have faith enough in me to know it is ridiculous; and, indeed, the imputation could in any case only be temporary. As soon as the thing gets into court I could bring up the Lichfield ploughman to prove my possession of a gold Wulfric; and I could bring up Emily to prove that I had shown it to her that very morning. How lucky that I had happened to take it out and let her look at it! My case was, happily, as plain as a pikestaff. It was only momentarily that the weight of the evidence seemed so perversely to go against me.

Turning over all these various considerations in my mind with anxious hesitancy, the ten minutes managed to pass away almost before I had thoroughly realised the deep gravity of the situation.

As the clock on the chimney-piece pointed to the half-hour, the door opened once more, and the superintendent entered solemnly. 'Well, Mr. Tait,' he said in an anxious voice, 'have

you made up your mind to make a clean breast of it? Do you now admit, after full deliberation, that you have endeavoured to steal and clip the gold Wulfric?'

'No,' I answered firmly, 'I do not admit it; and I will willingly go before a jury of my countrymen to prove my innocence.'

'Then God help you, poor boy,' the superintendent cried despondently. 'I have done my best to save you, and you will not let me. Policeman, this is your prisoner. I give him in custody on a charge of stealing a gold coin, the property of the trustees of this Museum, valued at 175*l.* sterling.'

The policeman laid his hand upon my wrist. 'You will have to go along with me to the station, sir,' he said quietly.

Terrified and stunned as I was by the awfulness of the accusation, I could not forget or overlook the superintendent's evident reluctance and kindness. 'Mr. Harbourne,' I cried, 'you have tried to do your best for me. I am grateful to you for it, in spite of your terrible mistake, and I shall yet be able to show you that I am innocent.'

He shook his head gloomily. 'I have done my duty,' he said with a shudder. 'I have never before had a more painful one. Policeman, I must ask you now to do yours.'

III.

The police are always considerate to respectable-looking prisoners, and I had no difficulty in getting the sergeant in charge of the lock-up to telegraph for me to Emily, to say that I was detained by important business, which would prevent me taking her and her mother to the theatre that evening. But when I explained to him that my detention was merely temporary, and that I should be able to disprove the whole story as soon as I went before the magistrates, he winked most unpleasantly at the constable who had brought me in, and observed in a tone of vulgar sarcasm, 'We have a good many gentlemen here who says the same, sir—don't we, Jim? but they don't always find it so easy as they expected when they stands up afore the beak to prove their statements.'

I began to reflect that even a temporary prison is far from being a pleasant place for a man to stop in.

Next morning they took me up before the magistrate, and as the Museum authorities of course proved a *prima facie* case

against me, and as my solicitor advised me to reserve my defence, owing to the difficulty of getting up my witness from Lichfield in reasonable time, I was duly committed for trial at the next sessions of the Central Criminal Court.

I had often read before that people had been committed for trial, but till that moment I had no idea what a very unpleasant sensation it really is.

However, as I was a person of hitherto unblemished character, and wore a good coat made by a fashionable tailor, the magistrate decided to admit me to bail, if two sureties in 500*l.* each were promptly forthcoming for the purpose. Luckily, I had no difficulty in finding friends who believed in my story; and as I felt sure the lost Wulfrie would soon be found in cleaning the museum, I suffered perhaps a little less acutely than I might otherwise have done, owing to my profound confidence in the final triumph of the truth.

Nevertheless, as the case would be fully reported next morning in all the papers, I saw at once that I must go straight off and explain the matter without delay to Emily.

I will not dwell upon that painful interview. I will only say that Emily behaved as I of course knew she would behave. She was horrified and indignant at the dreadful accusation; and, woman-like, she was very angry with the superintendent. 'He ought to have taken your word for it, naturally, Harold,' she cried through her tears. 'But what a good thing, anyhow, that you happened to show the coin to me. I should recognise it anywhere among ten thousand.'

'That's well, darling,' I said, trying to kiss away her tears and cheer her up a little. 'I haven't the slightest doubt that when the trial comes we shall be able triumphantly to vindicate me from this terrible, groundless accusation.'

IV.

When the trial did actually come on, the Museum authorities began by proving their case against me in what seemed the most horribly damning fashion. The superintendent proved that on such and such a day, in such and such a case, he had seen a gold coin of Wulfrie of Mercia, the property of the Museum. He and Mactavish detailed the circumstances under which the coin was lost. The superintendent explained how he had asked me to submit to a search, and how, to avoid that indignity, I had myself

produced from my waistcoat-pocket a gold coin of Wulfric of Mercia, which I asserted to be a duplicate specimen, and my own property. The counsel for the Crown proceeded thus with the examination :—

‘Do you recognise the coin I now hand you?’

‘I do.’

‘What is it?’

‘The unique gold coin of Wulfric of Mercia, belonging to the Museum.’

‘You have absolutely no doubt as to its identity?’

‘Absolutely none whatsoever.’

‘Does it differ in any respect from the same coin as you previously saw it?’

‘Yes. It has been clipped round the edge with a sharp instrument, and a slight dent has been made by pressure on the obverse side, just below the W of Wulfric.’

‘Did you suspect the prisoner at the bar of having mutilated it?’

‘I did, and I asked him whether he had a knife in his possession. He answered no. I then asked him whether he would submit to be searched for a knife. He consented, and on my looking in his pocket I found the pair of nail-scissors I now produce, with a small file on either side.’

‘Do you believe the coin might have been clipped with those scissors?’

‘I do. The gold is very soft, having little alloy in its composition; and it could be easily cut by a strong-wristed man with a knife or scissors.’

As I listened, I didn’t wonder that the jury looked as if they already considered me guilty: but I smiled to myself when I thought how utterly Emily’s and the ploughman’s evidence would rebut this unworthy suspicion.

The next witness was the Museum cleaner. His evidence at first produced nothing fresh, but just at last, counsel set before him a paper, containing a few scraps of yellow metal, and asked him triumphantly whether he recognised them. He answered yes.

There was a profound silence. The court was interested and curious. I couldn’t quite understand it all, but I felt a terrible sinking.

‘What are they?’ asked the hostile barrister.

'They are some fragments of gold which I found in shaking the cocoa-nut matting on the floor of gallery 27 the Saturday after the attempted theft.'

I felt as if a mine had unexpectedly been sprung beneath me. How on earth those fragments of soft gold could ever have got there I couldn't imagine; but I saw the damaging nature of this extraordinary and inexplicable coincidence in half a second.

My counsel cross-examined all the witnesses for the prosecution, but failed to elicit anything of any value from any one of them. On the contrary, his questions put to the metallurgist of the Mint, who was called to prove the quality of the gold, only brought out a very strong opinion to the effect that the clippings were essentially similar in character to the metal composing the clipped Wulfric.

No wonder the jury seemed to think the case was going decidedly against me.

Then my counsel called his witnesses. I listened in the profoundest suspense and expectation.

The first witness was the ploughman from Lichfield. He was a well-meaning but very puzzle-headed old man, and he was evidently frightened at being confronted by so many clever wig-wearing barristers.

Nevertheless, my counsel managed to get the true story out of him at last with infinite patience, dexterity, and skill. The old man told us finally how he had found the coins and sold them to me for five pounds; and how one of them was of gold, with a queer head and goggle eyes pointed full face upon its surface.

When he had finished, the counsel for the Crown began his cross-examination. He handed the ploughman a gold coin. 'Did you ever see that before?' he asked quietly.

'To be sure I did,' the man answered, looking at it open-mouthed.

'What is it?'

'It's the bit I sold Mr. Tait there—the bit as I got out o' the old basin.'

Counsel turned triumphantly to the judge. 'My lord,' he said, 'this thing to which the witness swears is a gold piece of Ethelwulf of Wessex, by far the commonest and cheapest gold coin of the whole Anglo-Saxon period.'

It was handed to the jury side by side with the Wulfric of Mercia; and the difference, as I knew myself, was in fact

extremely noticeable. All that the old man could have observed in common between them must have been merely the archaic Anglo-Saxon character of the coinage.

As I heard that I began to feel that it was really all over.

My counsel tried on the re-examination to shake the old man's faith in his identification, and to make him transfer his story to the Wulfric which he had actually sold me. But it was all in vain. The ploughman had clearly the dread of perjury for ever before his eyes, and wouldn't go back for any consideration upon his first sworn statement. 'No, no, mister,' he said over and over again in reply to my counsel's bland suggestion, 'you ain't going to make me forswear myself for all your cleverness.'

The next witness was Emily. She went into the box pale and red-eyed, but very confident. My counsel examined her admirably; and she stuck to her point with womanly persistence, that she had herself seen the clipped Wulfric, and no other coin, on the morning of the supposed theft. She knew it was so, because she distinctly remembered the inscription, 'Wulfric Rex,' and the peculiar way the staring open eyes were represented with barbaric puerility.

Counsel for the Crown would only trouble the young lady with two questions. The first was a painful one, but it must be asked in the interests of justice. Were she and the prisoner at the bar engaged to be married to one another?

The answer came, slowly and timidly, 'Yes.'

Counsel drew a long breath, and looked her hard in the face. Could she read the inscription on that coin now produced?—handing her the Ethelwulf.

Great heavens! I saw at once the plot to disconcert her, but was utterly powerless to warn her against it.

Emily looked at it long and steadily. 'No,' she said at last, growing deadly pale and grasping the woodwork of the witness-box convulsively; 'I don't know the character in which it is written.'

Of course not: for the inscription was in the peculiar semi-runic Anglo-Saxon letters! She had never read the words 'Wulfric Rex' either. I had read them to her, and she had carried them away vaguely in her mind, imagining no doubt that she herself had actually deciphered them.

There was a slight pause, and I felt my blood growing cold within me. Then the counsel for the Crown handed her again

the genuine Wulfric, and asked her whether the letters upon it which she professed to have read were or were not similar to those of the Ethelwulf.

Instead of answering, Emily bent down her head between her hands, and burst suddenly into tears.

I was so much distressed at her terrible agitation that I forgot altogether for the moment my own perilous position, and I cried aloud, 'My lord, my lord, will you not interpose to spare her any further questions?'

'I think,' the judge said to the counsel for the Crown, 'you might now permit the witness to stand down.'

'I wish to re-examine, my lord,' my counsel put in hastily.

'No,' I said in his ear, 'no. Whatever comes of it, not another question. I had far rather go to prison than let her suffer this inexpressible torture for a single minute longer.'

Emily was led down, still crying bitterly, into the body of the court, and the rest of the proceedings went on uninterrupted.

The theory of the prosecution was a simple and plausible one. I had bought a common Anglo-Saxon coin, probably an Ethelwulf, valued at about twenty-two shillings, from the old Lichfield ploughman. I had thereupon conceived the fraudulent idea of pretending that I had a duplicate of the rare Wulfric. I had shown the Ethelwulf, clipped in a particular fashion, to the lady whom I was engaged to marry. I had then defaced and altered the genuine Wulfric at the Museum into the same shape with the aid of my pocket nail-scissors. And I had finally made believe to drop the coin accidentally upon the floor, while I had really secreted it in my waistcoat pocket. The theory for the defence had broken down utterly; and then there was the damning fact of the gold scrapings found in the cocoanut matting of the British Museum, which was to me the one great inexplicable mystery in the whole otherwise comprehensible mystification.

I felt myself that the case did indeed look very black against me. But would a jury venture to convict me on such very doubtful evidence?

The jury retired to consider their verdict. I stood in suspense in the dock, with my heart loudly beating. Emily remained in the body of the court below, looking up at me tearfully and penitently.

After twenty minutes the jury returned.

'Guilty or not guilty?'

The foreman answered aloud, 'Guilty.'

There was a piercing cry in the body of the court, and in a moment Emily was carried out half fainting and half hysterical.

The judge then calmly proceeded to pass sentence. He dwelt upon the enormity of my crime in one so well connected and so far removed from the dangers of mere vulgar temptations. He dwelt also upon the vandalism of which I had been guilty—myself a collector—in clipping and defacing a valuable and unique memorial of antiquity, the property of the nation. He did not wish to be severe upon a young man of hitherto blameless character; but the national collection must be secured against such a peculiarly insidious and cunning form of depredation. The sentence of the court was that I should be kept in—

Five years' penal servitude.

Crushed and annihilated as I was, I had still strength to utter a single final word. 'My lord,' I cried, 'the missing Wulfric will yet be found, and will hereafter prove my perfect innocence.'

'Remove the prisoner,' said the judge, coldly.

They took me down to the courtyard unresisting, where the prison van was standing in waiting.

On the steps I saw Emily and her mother, both crying bitterly. They had been told the sentence already, and were waiting to take a last farewell of me.

'Oh, Harold!' Emily cried, flinging her arms around me wildly, 'it's all my fault! It's my fault only! By my foolish stupidity I've lost your case. I've sent you to prison. Oh, Harold, I can never forgive myself. I've sent you to prison. I've sent you to prison.'

'Dearest,' I said, 'it won't be for long. I shall soon be free again. They'll find the Wulfric sooner or later, and then of course they'll let me out again.'

'Harold,' she cried, 'oh, Harold, Harold, don't you see? Don't you understand? This is a plot against you. It isn't lost. It isn't lost. That would be nothing. It's stolen; it's stolen!'

A light burst in upon me suddenly, and I saw in a moment the full depth of the peril that surrounded me.

PART II.

I.

It was some time before I could sufficiently accustom myself to my new life in the Isle of Portland to be able to think clearly and distinctly about the terrible blow that had fallen upon me. In the midst of all the petty troubles and discomforts of prison existence, I had no leisure at first fully to realise the fact that I was a convicted felon with scarcely a hope—not of release; for that I cared little—but of rehabilitation.

Slowly, however, I began to grow habituated to the new hard life imposed upon me, and to think in my cell of the web of circumstance which had woven itself so irresistibly around me.

I had only one hope. Emily knew I was innocent. Emily suspected, like me, that the Wulfric had been stolen. Emily would do her best, I felt certain, to heap together fresh evidence, and unravel this mystery to its very bottom.

Meanwhile, I thanked Heaven for the hard mechanical daily toil of cutting stone in Portland prison. I was a strong athletic young fellow enough. I was glad now that I had always loved the river at Oxford; my arms were stout and muscular. I was able to take my part in the regular work of the gang to which I belonged. Had it been otherwise—had I been set down to some quiet sedentary occupation, as first-class misdemeanants often are, I should have worn my heart out soon with thinking perpetually of poor Emily's terrible trouble.

When I first came, the Deputy-Governor, knowing my case well (had there not been leaders about me in all the papers?), very kindly asked me whether I would wish to be given work in the book-keeping department, where many educated convicts were employed as clerks and assistants. But I begged particularly to be put into an outdoor gang, where I might have to use my limbs constantly, and so keep my mind from eating itself up with perpetual thinking. The Deputy-Governor immediately consented, and gave me work in a quarrying gang, at the west end of the island, near Deadman's Bay on the edge of the Chesil.

For three months I worked hard at learning the trade of a quarryman, and succeeded far better than any of the other new hands who were set to learn at the same time with me. Their

heart was not in it ; mine was. Anything to escape that gnawing agony.

The other men in the gang were not agreeable or congenial companions. They taught me their established modes of inter-communication, and told me several facts about themselves, which did not tend to endear them to me. One of them, 1247, was put in for the manslaughter of his wife by kicking ; he was a low-browed, brutal London drayman, and he occupied the next cell to mine, where he disturbed me much in my sleepless nights by his loud snoring. Another, a much slighter and more intelligent-looking man, was a skilled burglar, sentenced to fourteen years for 'cracking a crib' in the neighbourhood of Hampstead. A third was a sailor, convicted of gross cruelty to a defenceless Lascar. They all told me the nature of their crimes with a brutal frankness which fairly surprised me ; but when I explained to them in return that I had been put in upon a false accusation, they treated my remarks with a galling contempt that was absolutely unsupportable. After a short time I ceased to communicate with my fellow-prisoners in any way, and remained shut up with my own thoughts in utter isolation.

By-and-bye I found that the other men in the same gang were beginning to dislike me strongly, and that some among them actually whispered to one another—what they seemed to consider a very strong point indeed against me—that I must really have been convicted by mistake, and that I was a regular stuck-up sneaking Methodist. They complained that I worked a great deal too hard, and so made the other felons seem lazy by comparison ; and they also objected to my prompt obedience to our warder's commands, as tending to set up an exaggerated and impossible standard of discipline.

Between this warder and myself, on the other hand, there soon sprang up a feeling which I might almost describe as one of friendship. Though by the rules of the establishment we could not communicate with one another except upon matters of business, I liked him for his uniform courtesy, kindness, and forbearance ; while I could easily see that he liked me in return, by contrast with the other men who were under his charge. He was one of those persons whom some experience of prisons then and since has led me to believe less rare than most people would imagine—men in whom the dreary life of a prison warder, instead of engendering hardness of heart and cold unsympathetic stern-

ness, has engendered a certain profound tenderness and melancholy of spirit. I grew quite fond of that one honest warder, among so many coarse and criminal faces; and I found, on the other hand, that my fellow-prisoners hated me all the more because, as they expressed it in their own disgusting jargon, I was sucking up to that confounded dog of a barker. It happened once, when I was left for a few minutes alone with the warder, that he made an attempt for a moment, contrary to regulations, to hold a little private conversation with me.

'1430,' he said in a low voice, hardly moving his lips, for fear of being overlooked, 'what is your outside name?'

I answered quietly, without turning to look at him, 'Harold Tait.'

He gave a little involuntary start. 'What!' he cried. 'Not him that took a coin from the British Museum?'

I bridled up angrily. 'I did not take it,' I cried with all my soul. 'I am innocent, and have been put in here by some terrible error.'

He was silent for half a second. Then he said musingly, 'Sir, I believe you. You are speaking the truth. I will do all I can to make things easy for you.'

That was all he said then. But from that day forth he always spoke to me in private as 'Sir,' and never again as '1430.'

An incident arose at last out of this condition of things which had a very important effect upon my future position.

One day, about three months after I was committed to prison, we were all told off as usual to work in a small quarry on the cliff-side overhanging the long expanse of pebbly beach known as the Chesil. I had reason to believe afterwards that a large open fishing boat lying upon the beach below at the moment had been placed there as part of a concerted scheme by the friends of the Hampstead burglar; and that it contained ordinary clothing for all the men in our gang, except myself only. The idea was evidently that the gang should overpower the warder, seize the boat, change their clothes instantly, taking turns about meanwhile with the navigation, and make straight off for the shore at Lulworth, where they could easily disperse without much chance of being re-captured. But of all this I was of course quite ignorant at the time, for they had not thought well to intrust their secret to the ears of the sneaking virtuous Methodist.

A few minutes after we arrived at the quarry, I was working

with two other men at putting a blast in, when I happened to look round quite accidentally, and, to my great horror, saw 1247, the brutal wife-kicker, standing behind with a huge block of stone in his hands, poised just above the warder's head, in a threatening attitude. The other men stood around waiting and watching. I had only just time to cry out in a tone of alarm, 'Take care, warder, he'll murder you!' when the stone descended upon the warder's head, and he fell at once, bleeding and half senseless, upon the ground beside me. In a second, while he shrieked and struggled, the whole gang was pressing savagely and angrily around him.

There was no time to think or hesitate. Before I knew almost what I was doing, I had seized his gun and ammunition, and, standing over his prostrate body, I held the men at bay for a single moment. Then 1247 advanced threateningly, and tried to put his foot upon the fallen warder.

I didn't wait or reflect one solitary second. I drew the trigger, and fired full upon him. The bang sounded fiercely in my ears, and for a moment I could see nothing through the smoke of the rifle.

With a terrible shriek he fell in front of me, not dead, but seriously wounded.

'The boat, the boat,' the others cried loudly. 'Knock him down! Kill him! Take the boat, all of you.'

At that moment the report of my shot had brought another warder hastily to the top of the quarry.

'Help, help!' I cried. 'Come quick, and save us. These brutes are trying to murder our warder!'

The man rushed back to call for aid; but the way down the zigzag path was steep and tortuous, and it was some time before they could manage to get down and succour us.

Meanwhile the other convicts pressed savagely around us, trying to jump upon the warder's body and force their way past to the beach beneath us. I fired again, for the rifle was double-barrelled; but it was impossible to reload in such a tumult, so, after the next shot, which hit no one, I laid about me fiercely with the butt end of the gun, and succeeded in knocking down four of the savages, one after another. By that time the warders from above had safely reached us, and formed a circle of fixed bayonets around the rebellious prisoners.

'Thank God!' I cried, flinging down the rifle, and rushing up

to the prostrate warder. 'He is still alive. He is breathing! He is breathing!'

'Yes,' he murmured in a faint voice, 'I am alive, and I thank you for it. But for you, sir, these fellows here would certainly have murdered me.'

'You are badly wounded yourself, 1430,' one of the other warders said to me, as the rebels were rapidly secured and marched off sullenly back to the prison. 'Look, your own arm is bleeding fiercely.'

Then for the first time I was aware that I was one mass of wounds from head to foot, and that I was growing faint from loss of blood. In defending the fallen warder I had got punched and pummelled on every side, just the same as one used to get long ago in a bully at football when I was a boy at Rugby, only much more seriously.

The warders brought down seven stretchers: one for me; one for the wounded warder; one for 1247, whom I had shot; and four for the convicts whom I had knocked over with the butt end of the rifle. They carried us up on them, strongly guarded, in a long procession.

At the door of the infirmary the Governor met us. '1430,' he said to me, in a very kind voice, 'you have behaved most admirably. I saw you myself quite distinctly from my drawing-room windows. Your bravery and intrepidity are well deserving of the highest recognition.'

'Sir,' I answered, 'I have only tried to do my duty. I couldn't stand by and see an innocent man murdered by such a pack of bloodthirsty ruffians.'

The Governor turned aside a little surprised. 'Who is 1430?' he asked quietly.

A subordinate, consulting a book, whispered my name and supposed crime to him confidentially. The Governor nodded twice, and seemed to be satisfied.

'Sir,' the wounded warder said faintly from his stretcher, '1430 is an innocent man unjustly condemned, if ever there was one.'

II.

On the Thursday week following, when my wounds were all getting well, the whole body of convicts was duly paraded at half-past eleven in front of the Governor's house.

The Governor came out, holding an official-looking paper in his right hand. 'No. 1430,' he said in a loud voice, 'stand forward.' And I stood forward.

'No. 1430, I have the pleasant duty of informing you, in face of all your fellow-prisoners, that your heroism and self-devotion in saving the life of Warder James Woollacott, when he was attacked and almost overpowered on the 20th of this month by a gang of rebellious convicts, has been reported to Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department; and that on his recommendation Her Majesty has been graciously pleased to grant you a Free Pardon for the remainder of the time during which you were sentenced to penal servitude.'

For a moment I felt quite stunned and speechless. I reeled on my feet so much that two of the warders jumped forward to support me. It was a great thing to have at least one's freedom. But in another minute the real meaning of the thing came clearer upon me, and I recoiled from the bare sound of those horrid words, a Free Pardon. I didn't want to be pardoned like a convicted felon: I wanted to have my innocence proved before the eyes of all England. For my own sake, and still more for Emily's sake, rehabilitation was all I cared for.

'Sir,' I said, touching my cap respectfully, and saluting the Governor according to our wonted prison discipline, 'I am very greatly obliged to you for your kindness in having made this representation to the Home Secretary; but I feel compelled to say I cannot accept a free pardon. I am wholly guiltless of the crime of which I have been convicted; and I wish that instead of pardoning me the Home Secretary would give instructions to the detective police to make a thorough investigation of the case, with the object of proving my complete innocence. Till that is done, I prefer to remain an inmate of Portland Prison. What I wish is not pardon, but to be restored as an honest man to the society of my equals.'

The Governor paused for a moment, and consulted quietly in an undertone with one or two of his subordinates. Then he turned to me with great kindness, and said in a loud voice, 'No. 1430, I have no power any longer to detain you in this prison, even if I wished to do so, after you have once obtained Her Majesty's free pardon. My duty is to dismiss you at once, in accordance with the terms of this document. However, I will communicate the substance of your request to the Home Secretary,

with whom such a petition, so made, will doubtless have the full weight that may rightly attach to it. You must now go with these warders, who will restore you your own clothes, and then formally set you at liberty. But if there is anything further you would wish to speak to me about, you can do so afterward in your private capacity as a free man at two o'clock in my own office.'

I thanked him quietly and then withdrew. At two o'clock I duly presented myself in ordinary clothes at the Governor's office.

We had a long and confidential interview, in the course of which I was able to narrate to the Governor at full length all the facts of my strange story exactly as I have here detailed them. He listened to me with the greatest interest, checking and confirming my statements at length by reference to the file of papers brought to him by a clerk. When I had finished my whole story, he said to me quite simply, 'Mr. Tait, it may be imprudent of me in my position and under such peculiar circumstances to say so, but I fully and unreservedly believe your statement. If anything that I can say or do can be of any assistance to you in proving your innocence, I shall be very happy indeed to exert all my influence in your favour.'

I thanked him warmly with tears in my eyes.

'And there is one point in your story,' he went on, 'to which I, who have seen a good deal of such doubtful cases, attach the very highest importance. You say that gold clippings, pronounced to be similar in character to the gold Wulfric, were found shortly after by a cleaner at the Museum on the cocoa-nut matting of the floor where the coin was examined by you?'

I nodded, blushing crimson. 'That,' I said, 'seems to me the strangest and most damning circumstance against me in the whole story.'

'Precisely,' the Governor answered quietly. 'And if what you say is the truth (as I believe it to be), it is also the circumstance which best gives us a cue to use against the real culprit. The person who stole the coin was too clever by half, or else not quite clever enough for his own protection. In manufacturing that last fatal piece of evidence against you he was also giving you a certain clue to his own identity.'

'How so?' I asked, breathless.

'Why, don't you see? The thief must in all probability have been somebody connected with the Museum. He must have seen you comparing the Wulfric with your own coin. He must have

picked it up and carried it off secretly at the moment you dropped it. He must have clipped the coin to manufacture further hostile evidence. And he must have dropped the clippings afterwards on the cocoa-nut matting in the same gallery on purpose in order to heighten the suspicion against you.'

'You are right,' I cried, brightening up at the luminous suggestion—'you are right, obviously. And there is only one man who could have seen and heard enough to carry out this abominable plot—Mactavish!'

'Well, find him out and prove the case against him, Mr. Tait,' the Governor said warmly, 'and if you send him here to us I can promise you that he will be well taken care of.'

I bowed and thanked him, and was about to withdraw, but he held out his hand to me with perfect frankness.

'Mr. Tait,' he said, 'I can't let you go away so. Let me have your hand in token that you bear us no grudge for the way we have treated you during your unfortunate imprisonment, and that I, for my part, am absolutely satisfied of the truth of your statement.'

III.

The moment I arrived in London I drove straight off without delay to Emily's. I had telegraphed beforehand that I had been granted a free pardon, but had not stopped to tell her why or under what conditions.

Emily met me in tears in the passage. 'Harold! Harold!' she cried, flinging her arms wildly around me. 'Oh, my darling! my darling! how can I ever say it to you? Mamma says she won't allow me to see you here any longer.'

It was a terrible blow, but I was not unprepared for it. How could I expect that poor, conventional, commonplace old lady to have any faith in me after all she had read about me in the newspapers?

'Emily,' I said, kissing her over and over again tenderly, 'you must come out with me, then, this very minute, for I want to talk with you over matters of importance. Whether your mother wishes it or not, you must come out with me this very minute.'

Emily put on her bonnet hastily and walked out with me into the streets of London. It was growing dark, and the neighbourhood was a very quiet one; or else perhaps even my own Emily would have felt a little ashamed of walking about the streets of

London with a man whose hair was still cropped short around his head like a common felon's.

I told her all the story of my release, and Emily listened to it in profound silence.

'Harold!' she cried, 'my darling Harold!' (when I told her the tale of my desperate battle over the fallen warder), 'you are the bravest and best of men. I knew you would vindicate yourself sooner or later. What we have to do now is to show that Mactavish stole the Wulfric. I know he stole it; I read it at the trial in his clean-shaven villain's face. I shall prove it still, and then you will be justified in the eyes of everybody.'

'But how can we manage to communicate meanwhile, darling?' I cried eagerly. 'If your mother won't allow you to see me, how are we ever to meet and consult about it?'

'There's only one way, Harold—only one way; and as things now stand you mustn't think it strange of me to propose it. Harold, you must marry me immediately, whether mamma will let us or not!'

'Emily!' I cried, 'my own darling! your confidence and trust in me makes me I can't tell you how proud and happy. That you should be willing to marry me even while I am under such a cloud as this gives me a greater proof of your love than anything else you could possibly do for me. But, darling, I am too proud to take you at your word. For your sake, Emily, I will never marry you until all the world has been compelled unreservedly to admit my innocence.'

Emily blushed and cried a little. 'As you will, Harold, dearest,' she answered, trembling, 'I can afford to wait for you. I know that in the end the truth will be established.'

IV.

A week or two later I was astonished one morning at receiving a visit in my London lodgings from the warder Woollacott, whose life I had been happily instrumental in saving at Portland Prison.

'Well, sir,' he said, grasping my hand warmly and gratefully, 'you see I haven't yet entirely recovered from that terrible morning. I shall bear the marks of it about me for the remainder of my lifetime. The Governor says I shall never again be fit for duty, so they've pensioned me off very honourable.'

I told him how pleased I was that he should have

liberally treated, and then we fell into conversation about myself and the means of re-establishing my perfect innocence.

'Sir,' said he, 'I shall have plenty of leisure, and shall be comfortably off now. If there's anything that I can do to be of service to you in the matter, I shall gladly do it. My time is entirely at your disposal.'

I thanked him warmly, but told him that the affair was already in the hands of the regular detectives, who had been set to work upon it by the Governor's influence with the Home Secretary.

By-and-bye I happened to mention confidentially to him my suspicions of the man Mactavish. An idea seemed to occur to the warder suddenly; but he said not a word to me about it at the time. A few days later, however, he came back to me quietly and said, in a confidential tone of voice, 'Well, sir, I think we may still manage to square him.'

'Square who, Mr. Woollacott? I don't understand you.'

'Why, Mactavish, sir. I found out he had a small house near the Museum, and his wife lets a lodging there for a single man. I've gone and taken the lodging, and I shall see whether in the course of time something or other doesn't come out of it.'

I smiled and thanked him for his enthusiasm in my cause; but I confess I didn't see how anything on earth of any use to me was likely to arise from this strange proceeding on his part.

V.

It was that same week, I believe, that I received two other unexpected visitors. They came together. One of them was the Superintendent of Coins at the British Museum; the other was the well-known antiquary and great authority upon the Anglo-Saxon coinage, Sir Theophilus Wraxton.

'Mr. Tait,' the superintendent began, not without some touch of natural shame-facedness in his voice and manner, 'I have reason to believe that I may possibly have been mistaken in my positive identification of the coin you showed me that day at the Museum as our own specimen of the gold Wulfric. If I *was* mistaken, then I have unintentionally done you a most grievous wrong; and for that wrong, should my suspicions turn out ill-founded, I shall owe you the deepest and most heart-felt apologies. But the only reparation I can possibly make you is the one I am doing to-day by bringing here my friend Sir Theophilus Wraxton. He has a

communication of some importance to make to you; and if he is right, I can only beg your pardon most humbly for the error I have committed in what I believed to be the discharge of my duties.'

'Sir,' I answered, 'I saw at the time that you were the victim of a mistake, as I was the victim of a most unfortunate concurrence of circumstances; and I bear you no grudge whatsoever for the part you bore in subjecting me to what is really in itself a most unjust and unfounded suspicion. You only did what you believed to be your plain duty; and you did it with marked reluctance, and with every desire to leave me every possible loophole of escape from what you conceived as a momentary yielding to a vile temptation. But what is it that Sir Theophilus Wraxton wishes to tell me?'

'Well, my dear sir,' the old gentleman began, warmly, 'I haven't the slightest doubt in the world myself that you have been quite unwarrantably disbelieved about a plain matter of fact that ought at once to have been immediately apparent to anybody who knew anything in the world about the gold Anglo-Saxon coinage. No reflection in the world upon you, Harbourne, my dear friend—no reflection in the world upon you in the matter; but you must admit that you've been pig-headedly hasty in jumping to a conclusion, and ignorantly determined in sticking to it against better evidence. My dear sir, I haven't the very slightest doubt in the world that the coin now in the British Museum is *not* the one which I have seen there previously, and which I have figured in the third volume of my "Early Northumbrian and Mercian Numismatist!" Quite otherwise; quite otherwise, I assure you.'

'How do you recognize that it is different, sir?' I cried excitedly. 'The two coins were struck at just the same mint from the same die, and I examined them closely together, and saw absolutely no difference between them, except the dent and the amount of the clipping.'

'Quite true, quite true,' the old gentleman replied with great deliberation. 'But look here, sir. Here is the drawing I took of the Museum Wulfric fourteen years ago, for the third volume of my "Northumbrian Numismatist." That drawing was made with the aid of careful measurements, which you will find detailed in the text at page 230. Now, here again is the duplicate Wulfric—permit me to call it *your* Wulfric; and if you will compare the two you'll find, I think, that though your Wulfric is a great deal smaller than the original one, taken as a whole, yet on one

diameter, the diameter from the letter U in Wulfric to the letter R in Rex, it is nearly an eighth of an inch broader than the specimen I have there figured. Well, sir, you may cut as much as you like off a coin, and make it smaller; but hang me if by cutting away at it for all your lifetime you can make it an eighth of an inch broader anyhow, in any direction.'

I looked immediately at the coin, the drawing, and the measurements in the book, and saw at a glance that Sir Theophilus was right.

'How on earth did you find it out?' I asked the bland old gentleman, breathlessly.

'Why, my dear sir, I remembered the old coin perfectly, having been so very particular in my drawing and measurement; and the moment I clapped eyes on the other one yesterday, I said to my good friend Harbourne, here: "Harbourne," said I, "somebody's been changing your Wulfric in the case over yonder for another specimen." "Changing it!" said Harbourne: "not a bit of it; clipping it, you mean." "No, no, my good fellow," said I: "do you suppose I don't know the same coin again when I see it, and at my time of life too? This is another coin, not the same one clipped. It's bigger across than the old one from there to there." "No, it isn't," says he. "But it is," I answer. "Just you look in my 'Northumbrian and Mercian' and see if it isn't so." "You must be mistaken," says Harbourne. "If I am, I'll eat my head," says I. Well, we get down the 'Numismatist' from the bookshelf then and there; and sure enough, it turns out just as I told him. Harbourne turned as white as a ghost, I can tell you, as soon as he discovered it. "Why," says he, "I've sent a poor young fellow off to Portland Prison, only three or four months ago, for stealing that very Wulfric." And then he told me all the story. "Very well," said I, "then the only thing you've got to do is just to go and call on him to-morrow, and let him know that you've had it proved to you, fairly proved to you, that this is not the original Wulfric."

'Sir Theophilus,' I said, 'I'm much obliged to you. What you point out is by far the most important piece of evidence I've yet had to offer. Mr. Harbourne, have you kept the gold clippings that were found that morning on the cocoanut matting?'

'I have, Mr. Tait,' the Superintendent answered anxiously. 'And Sir Theophilus and I have been trying to fit them upon the coin in the Museum shelves; and I am bound to admit I quite

agree with him that they must have been cut off a specimen decidedly larger in one diameter and smaller in another than the existing one—in short, that they do not fit the clipped Wulfric now in the Museum.’

VI.

It was just a fortnight later that I received quite unexpectedly a telegram from Rome directed to me at my London lodgings. I tore it open hastily; it was signed by Emily, and contained only these few words: ‘We have found the Museum Wulfric. The Superintendent is coming over to identify and reclaim it. Can you manage to run across immediately with him?’

For a moment I was lost in astonishment, delight, and fear. How and why had Emily gone over to Rome? Who could she have with her to take care of her and assist her? How on earth had she tracked the missing coin to its distant hiding-place? It was all a profound mystery to me; and after my first outburst of joy and gratitude, I began to be afraid that Emily might have been misled by her eagerness and anxiety into following up the traces of the wrong coin.

However, I had no choice but to go to Rome and see the matter ended; and I went alone, wearing out my soul through that long journey with suspense and fear; for I had not managed to hit upon the superintendent, who, through his telegram being delivered a little the sooner, had caught a train six hours earlier than the one I went by.

As I arrived at the Central Station at Rome, I was met, to my surprise, by a perfect crowd of familiar faces. First, Emily herself rushed to me, kissed me, and assured me a hundred times over that it was all right, and that the missing coin was undoubtedly recovered. Then, the superintendent, more shame-faced than ever, and very grave, but with a certain moisture in his eyes, confirmed her statement by saying that he had got the real Museum Wulfric undoubtedly in his pocket. Then Sir Theophilus, who had actually come across with Lady Wraxton on purpose to take care of Emily, added his assurances and congratulations. Last of all, Woollacott, the warder, stepped up to me and said simply, ‘I’m glad, sir, that it was through me as it all came out so right and even.’

‘Tell me how it all happened,’ I cried, almost faint with joy,

and still wondering whether my innocence had really been proved beyond all fear of cavil.

Then Woollacott began, and told me briefly the whole story. He had consulted with the Superintendent and Sir Theophilus, without saying a word to me about it, and had kept a close watch upon all the letters that came for Mactavish. A rare Anglo-Saxon coin is not a chattel that one can easily get rid of every day; and Woollacott shrewdly gathered from what Sir Theophilus had told him that Mactavish (or whoever else had stolen the coin) would be likely to try to dispose of it as far away from England as possible, especially after all the comments that had been made on this particular Wulfric in the English newspapers. So he took every opportunity of intercepting the postman at the front door, and looking out for envelopes with foreign postage stamps. At last one day a letter arrived for Mactavish with an Italian stamp and a cardinal's red hat stamped like a crest on the flap of the envelope. Woollacott was certain that things of that sort didn't come to Mactavish every day about his ordinary business. Braving the penalties for appropriating a letter, he took the liberty to open this suspicious communication, and found it was a note from Cardinal Trevelyan, the Pope's Chamberlain, and a well-known collector of antiquities referring to early Church history in England, and that it was in reply to an offer of Mactavish's to send the Cardinal for inspection a rare gold coin not otherwise specified. The Cardinal expressed his readiness to see the coin, and to pay £150 for it, if it proved to be rare and genuine as described. Woollacott felt certain that this communication must refer to the gold Wulfric. He therefore handed the letter to Mrs. Mactavish when the postman next came his rounds, and waited to see whether Mactavish any day afterwards went to the post to register a small box or packet. Meanwhile he communicated with Emily and the Superintendent, being unwilling to buoy me up with a doubtful hope until he was quite sure that their plan had succeeded. The Superintendent wrote immediately to the Cardinal, mentioning his suspicions, and received a reply to the effect that he expected a coin of Wulfric to be sent him shortly. Sir Theophilus, who had been greatly interested in the question of the coin, kindly offered to take Emily over to Rome, in order to get the criminating piece, as soon as it arrived, from Cardinal Trevelyan. That was, in turn, the story that they all told me, piece by piece, in the Central Station at Rome that eventful morning.

‘And Mactavish?’ I asked of the Superintendent eagerly.

‘Is in custody in London already,’ he answered somewhat sternly. ‘I had a warrant out against him before I left town on this journey.’

At the trial the whole case was very clearly proved against him, and my innocence was fully established before the face of all my fellow-countrymen. A fortnight later my wife and I were among the rocks and woods at Ambleside; and when I returned to London, it was to take a place in the department of coins at the British Museum, which the Superintendent begged of me to accept as some further proof in the eyes of everybody that the suspicion he had formed in the matter of the Wulfric was a most unfounded and wholly erroneous one. The coin itself I kept as a memento of a terrible experience; but I have given up collecting on my own account entirely, and am quite content now-a-days to bear my share in guarding the national collection from other depredators of the class of Mactavish.



SOLES AND TURBOT.

'ONCE upon a time,' says that delicious creation of Lewis Carroll's, the Mock Turtle, 'I was a real turtle!' Once upon a time, the modern sole might with greater truth plaintively observe, I was a very respectable sort of a young cod fish. In those happy days, my head was not unsymmetrically twisted and distracted all on one side; my mouth did not open laterally instead of vertically; my two eyes were not incongruously congregated on the right half of my distorted visage; and my whole body was not arrayed, like a Portland convict's, in a parti-coloured suit, dark-brown on the right and fleshy-white on the left department of my unfortunate person. When I was young and innocent, I looked externally very much like any other swimming thing, except to be sure that I was perfectly transparent, like a speck of jellyfish. I had one eye on each side of my head; my face and mouth were a model of symmetry; and I swam upright like the rest of my kind, instead of all on one side after the bad habit of my own immediate family. Such, in fact, is the true portrait of the baby sole, for the first few days after it has been duly hatched out of the eggs deposited on the shallow spawning places by the mother fishes.

After some weeks, however, a change comes o'er the spirit of the young flat-fish's dream of freedom. In his very early life he is a wanderer and a vagabond on the face of the waters, leading what the scientific men prettily describe as a pelagic existence, and much more frequently met with in the open sea than among the shallows and sandbanks which are to form the refuge of his maturer years. But soon his *Wanderjähre* are fairly over: the transparency of early youth fades out with him exactly as it fades out in the human subject: he begins to seek the recesses of the sea, settles down quietly in a comfortable hollow, and gives up his youthful Bohemian aspirations in favour of safety and respectability on a sandy bottom. This, of course, is all as it should be; in thus sacrificing freedom to the necessities of existence he only follows the universal rule of animated nature. But like all the rest of us when we settle down into our final groove, he shortly begins to develop a tendency towards distinct one-sidedness.

Lying flat on the sand upon his left cheek and side, he quickly undergoes a strange metamorphosis from the perfect and symmetrical to the lopsided condition. His left eye, having now nothing in particular to look at on the sands below, takes naturally to squinting as hard as it can round the corner, to observe the world above it; and so effectually does it manage to squint that it at last pulls all the socket and surrounding parts clean round the head to the right or upper surface. In short, the young sole lies on his left side till that half of his face (except the mouth) is compelled to twist itself round to the opposite cheek, thus giving him through life the appearance constantly deprecated by nurses who meet all unilateral grimaces on the part of their charges with the awful suggestion, 'Suppose you were to be struck so!' The young sole is actually struck so, and remains in that distressing condition ever afterward.

This singular early history of the individual sole evidently recapitulates for us in brief the evolutionary history of the entire group to which he belongs. It is pretty clear (to believers at least) that the prime ancestor of all the flat-fish was a sort of cod, and that his descendants only acquired their existing flatness by long persistence in the pernicious habit of lying always entirely on one side. Why the primæval flat-fish first took to this queer custom is equally easy to understand. Soles, turbot, plaice, brill, and other members of the flat-fish family are all, as we well know, very excellent edible fishes. Their edibility is as highly appreciated by the sharks and dogfish as by the enlightened public of a Christian land. Moreover, they are ill-provided with any external protection, having neither fierce jaws, like the pike and shark, efficient weapons of attack, like the swordfish and the electric eel, or stout defensive armour, like the globefish, the filefish, and the bony pike, whose outer covering is as effectually repellent as that of a tortoise, an armadillo, or a hedgehog. The connection between these apparently dissimilar facts is by no means an artificial one. Fish which possess one form of protection seldom require the additional aid of another: for example, all the electric fish have scaleless bodies, for the very simple reason that no unwary larger species is at all likely to make an attempt to bite them across the middle; if it did, it would soon retire with a profound respect through all its future life for the latent resources of electrical science. But the defenceless ancestor of the poor flat-fishes was quite devoid of any such offensive or

defensive armour, and if he was to survive at all he must look about (metaphorically speaking) for some other means of sharing in the survival of the fittest. He found it in the now-ingrained habit of skulking unperceived on the sandy bottom. By that plan he escaped the notice of his ever-present and watchful enemies. He followed (unconsciously) the good advice of the Roman poet : *bene latuit*.

But when the father of all soles (turbot, brill, and dabs included) first took to the family trick of lying motionless on the sea bottom, two courses lay open before him. (That there were not three was probably due to the enforced absence of Mr. Gladstone.) He might either have lain flat on his under-surface, like the rays and skates, in which case he would of course have flattened out symmetrically sideways, with both his eyes in their normal position ; or he might have lain on the right or left side exclusively, in which case one side would soon practically come to be regarded as the top and the other side as the bottom surface. For some now almost incomprehensible reason, the father of all soles chose the latter and more apparently uncomfortable of these two possible alternatives. Imagine yourself to lie (as a baby) on your left cheek till your left eye gradually twists round to a new position close beside its right neighbour, while your mouth still continues to open in the middle of your face as before, and you will have some faint comparative picture of the personal evolution of an infant sole. Only you must of course remember that this curious result of hereditary squinting, transmitted in unbroken order through so many generations, is greatly facilitated by the cartilaginous nature of the skull in young flat-fish.

When once the young sole has taken permanently to lying on his left side, he is no longer able to swim vertically ; he can only wriggle along sideways on the bottom, with a peculiarly slow, sinuous, and undulating motion. In fact, it would be a positive disadvantage to him to show himself in the upper waters, and for this very purpose Nature, with her usual foresight, has deprived him altogether of a swim bladder, by whose aid most other fishes constantly regulate their specific gravity, so as to rise or sink at will in the surrounding medium. Some people may indeed express surprise at learning that fish know anything at all about specific gravity ; but as they probably manage the alteration quite unconsciously, just as we ourselves move our limbs without ever for a moment reflecting that we are pulling on the

flexor or extensor muscles, this objection may fairly be left unanswered.

The way in which Nature has worked in depriving the sole of a swim bladder is no doubt the simple and popular one of natural selection; in other words, she has managed it by the soles with swim bladders being always promptly devoured. Originally, we may well suppose, the ancestral sole, before he began to be a sole at all (if I may be permitted that frank Hibernicism), possessed this useful aerostatic organ just like all other kinds of fishes. But when once he took to lurking on the bottom, and trying to pass himself off as merely a bit of the surrounding sandbank, the article in question would obviously be disadvantageous to him under his altered circumstances. A bit of the sandbank which elevates itself vertically in the water on a couple of side fins is sure to attract the unfavourable attention of the neighbouring dog-fish, who love soles like human epicures. Accordingly, every aspiring sole that ever sought to rise in the world with undue levity was sure to be snapped up by a passing foe, who thus effectually prevented it from passing on its own peculiar aspirations and swim bladder to future generations. On the other hand, the unaspiring soles that hugged the bottom and were content to flounder along contentedly sideways, instead of assuming the perpendicular, for the sake of appearances, at the peril of their lives, lived and flourished to a good old age, and left many successive relays of spawn to continue their kind in later ages. The swim bladder would thus gradually atrophy from disuse, just as always happens in the long-run with practically functionless and obsolete organs. The modern sole bears about perpetually in his own person the mark of his unenergetic and sluggish ancestry.

At the same time that the young sole, setting up in life on his own account, begins to lie on his left side only, and acquires his adult obliquity of vision, another singular and closely correlated change begins to affect his personal appearance. He started in life, you will remember, as a transparent body; and this transparency is commonly found in a great many of the earliest and lowest vertebrate organisms. Professor Ray Lankester, indeed, who is certainly far enough from being a fanciful or imaginative person, has shown some grounds for believing that our earliest recognisable ancestor, the primitive vertebrate, now best represented by that queer little mud fish, the lancelet, as well as by

the too-famous and much-abused ascidian larva, was himself perfectly translucent. One result of this ancient transparency we still carry about with us in our own organisation. The eye of man and of other higher animals, instead of being a modification of the skin (as is the case with the organ of vision in invertebrates generally), consists essentially of a sort of bag or projection from the brain, turned inside out like the finger of a glove, and made by a very irregular arrangement to reach at last the outside of the face. In the act of being formed, the human eye in fact buds out from the body of the brain, and gradually elongates itself upon a sort of stalk or handle, afterwards known as the optic nerve. Professor Lankester suggests, as a probable explanation of this quaint and apparently rather round-about arrangement, that our primitive ancestor was as clear as glass, and had his eye inside his brain, as is still the case with the ascidian larva. As soon as his descendants began to grow opaque, the eye was forced to push itself outward, so as to reach the surface of the body; and thus at last, we may imagine, it came to occupy its present prominent position on the full front of all vertebrate animals.

To return to our sole, however, whom I have left too long waiting in the sand, to undergo his next transformation: as soon as he has selected a side on which to lie, he begins to grow dark, and a pigmentary matter forms itself on the upper surface, exposed to the light. This is a very common effect of exposure, sufficiently familiar to ladies and others, and therefore hardly calling for deliberate explanation. But the particular form which the colouring takes in the true sole and in various other kinds of flat-fish is very characteristic, and its origin is one of the most interesting illustrations of natural selection to be found within the whole range of animated nature. In every case, it exactly resembles the coloration of the ground on which the particular species habitually reposes. For example, the edible sole lies always on sandy banks, and the spots upon its surface are so precisely similar to the sand around it that in an aquarium, even when you actually know from the label that there is a sole to be found in a particular tank, you can hardly ever manage to spot him, as long as he lies perfectly quiet on the uniform bottom. Turbot, on the other hand, which prefers a more irregular pebbly bed, is darker brown in colour, and has the body covered on its upper side with little bony tubercles, which closely simulate the

uneven surface of the banks on which it basks. The plaice, again, a lover of open stony spots, where small shingle of various sorts is collected together in variegated masses, has its top side beautifully dappled with orange-red spots, which assimilate it in hue to the parti-coloured ledges whereon it rests. In this last case the brighter dabs of colour undoubtedly represent the bits of carnelian and other brilliant pebbles, whose tints of course are far more distinct when seen in water by refracted light than when looked at dry in the white and common daylight. We all know how much prettier pebbles always seem when picked up wet on the sea-shore than under any other circumstances.

Some few flat-fish even possess the chameleon power of altering their colour, in accordance with the nature of the bottom on which they are lying. The change is managed by pressing outward or inward certain layers of pigment cells, whose combination produces the desired hues.

The origin of this protective coloration must once more be set down to that *deus ex machinâ* of modern biology, natural selection. In the beginning, those flat-fish which happened to be more or less spotted and speckled would be most likely to escape the notice of their ever-watchful and rapacious foes; while those which were uniformly coloured brown or grey, and still more those which were actually black or light pink, would be at once spotted, snapped up, and devoured. Hence in every generation the ever-surviving sole or turbot was the one whose spots happened most closely to harmonise with the general coloration of the surrounding bottom. As these survivors would alone intermarry and bring up future families of like-minded habits, it would naturally result that the coloration would become fixed and settled as a hereditary type in each particular species. Meanwhile, the eyes of the enemies of flat-fish, ever on the look-out for a nice juicy plaice or flounder, would become educated by experience, and would grow sharper and ever sharper in detecting the flimsy pretences of insufficiently imitative or irregularly coloured individuals. Natural selection means in this case selection by the hungry jaws of starving dog-fish. When once the intelligent dog-fish has learnt to appreciate the fact that all is not sand that looks sandy, you may be sure he exercises a most vigilant superintendence over every bank he happens to come upon. None but the most absolutely indistinguishable soles are at all likely to escape his interested scrutiny.

The mere nature of the bottom upon which they lie has thus helped to become a differentiating agency for the various species and varieties of flat-fish. Soles, which easily enough avoid detection on the sandy flats, would soon be spotted and exterminated among the pebbly ridges beloved of plaice, or the shingly ledge especially affected by the rough-knobbed turbot. Flounders, whose colouring exactly adapts them to the soft ooze and shallow mud-banks at the mouths of rivers, would prove quite out of place on the deep pools in the Channel, covered with pale yellow sand, where the pretty lemon sole is most at home. In the case of the true sole, too, the long, graceful, sinuous fringe of fins is so arranged that it can fit accurately to the surface on which the fish is lying, and so add in a great measure to the appearance of continuity with the neighbouring sands. A sole, settling down on a ribbed patch of sand, can thus accommodate its shape to the underlying undulations, so that it is almost impossible to distinguish its outline, even when you know exactly where to look for it. Soles are very clever at choosing such deceptive hiding-places, and very seldom openly expose themselves on a flat horizontal surface. Moreover, whenever they settle, they take care partially to bury themselves in the sand, with a curious sidelong flapping motion, and so still more effectually screen themselves from intending observers.

I may note in passing that such correspondence in colour with the general hue of the surrounding medium is especially common wherever a single tone predominates largely in the wider aspect of nature. Arctic animals, as everybody knows, are always white. Ptarmigan and northern hares put on a snowy coat among the snows of winter. The uncommercial stoat needlessly transforms himself on the approach of cold weather into the expensive and much-persecuted ermine. Imagine for a moment the chances of life possessed by a bright scarlet animal among the snowfields of Greenland, and one can see at once the absolute necessity for this unvarying protective coloration. Even a royal duke would scarcely venture to approve of flaring red uniforms under such conditions. All the conspicuous creatures get immediately weeded out by their carnivorous enemies, owing to their too great obtrusiveness and loudness of dress; while those alone survive which exactly conform to the fashionable whiteness of external nature. So, too, in the desert every bird, lizard, grasshopper, butterfly, and cricket is uniformly dressed in light sand-colour. The intrusive

red or blue butterfly from neighbouring flowery fields gets promptly eaten up by the local bird, whose plumage he cannot distinguish from the sand around it. The intrusive scarlet or green bird from neighbouring forests finds the bread taken out of his mouth by the too severe competition of his desert brethren, who can steal upon the native grasshoppers unperceived, while he himself acts upon them like a red danger-signal, and is as sedulously avoided by the invisible insects as if he meant intentionally to advertise in flaming posters his own hostile and destructive purpose.

In short, sand-haunting creatures are and always must be necessarily sand-coloured.

A few tropical flat-fish, however, living as they do among the brilliant corals, pink sea-anemones, gorgeous holothurians, and banded shells of the Southern seas, are beautifully and vividly spotted and coloured with the liveliest patterns. In this case the necessity for protection compels the fish to adopt the exactly opposite tactics. All those young beginners which happen to show any tendency to plain brown colouring are sure to be recognised as fish, and get promptly eaten up among their bright surroundings; only those which look most like the neighbouring inedible and stinging nondescripts stand any chance of escaping with their precious lives. A Quaker garb which would easily pass unobserved in the murky English Channel would become at once conspicuous by contrast among the brilliant organisms of Amboyna or Tahiti. This beautifully proves the relativity of all things, as philosophers put it. Ordinary people express the same idea in simpler language by saying that circumstances alter cases.

Most of our English flat-fish lie consistently on one side, and that the left; they keep their right eye always uppermost. But the turbot and the brill reverse this arrangement, having the left side on top and coloured, while the right side is below and white. Two other fish, known as the fluke and the megrim, but not received in polite society, follow the example of their fashionable friends in this respect. But in no case are these habits perfectly ingrained; now and then one meets with a left-sided sole or a right-sided turbot, which looks as though a great deal were left to the mere taste and fancy of the individual flat-fish. Some have taken to lying most frequently on one side and some on the other; but it is interesting to note that when a normally right-sided individual has happened to lie with his left side uppermost that side becomes coloured and distorted exactly the same as in his more correct

brethren. This shows how purely acquired the whole habit must be. It points back clearly to the days when flat-fish were still merely a sort of cod, and suggests that their transformation into the unsymmetrical condition is merely a matter of deliberate choice on their own part. Indeed there seems good reason to believe that many young flat-fish never undergo this change at all, but swimming about freely in the open sea assume that peculiarly elongated and strange form known as the *leptocephalic*.

I don't mean to say that all *leptocephali* are originally the offspring of flat-fishes, but some probably are; and so a word or two about these monstrous oceanic idiots and imbeciles may not here be out of place.

Lolling about lazily in the open ocean a number of small, long, ribbon-like fish are frequently found, quite transparent and glassy in appearance, with no head at all to speak of, but furnished with a pair of big eyes close beside the tiny snout. They are languid, boneless, wormlike creatures, very gelatinous in substance, and looking much like pellucid eels without the skin on. For a long time these *leptocephali* (as they are called) were supposed to be a peculiar class of fishes, but they are now known to be young fry of various shore-haunting kinds, which have drifted out into the open ocean, and had their development permanently arrested for want of the natural environment. They are in fact fish idiots, and though they grow in size they never attain real maturity. If, as some authorities believe, many of these queer idiotic forms really represent stray flat-fish, then their symmetrical development once more points back to the happy days when the ancestral sole still swam upright, with one eye on each side of his head, instead of being distorted into a sort of aggravated squinter.

Besides the 'reversed' specimens of soles and turbot—right-sided when they ought to be left-sided, and *vice versa*—occasional double or ambidextrous individuals occur, in which the dark colour is equally developed on both sides of the body. Whether these impartial flat-fish are in the habit of turning over in their beds—whether they represent the uneasy sleepers of *pleuronectid* circles or otherwise—I am not in a position to state; but probably they are produced under circumstances where both sides have been frequently exposed to the action of light, which seems to have a sort of photographic effect upon the pigments of the fish's body. Everybody knows in fact that the upper side or back of most ordinary fish, exposed as it is to the sunlight, is darker than the

lower side or belly; and this natural result of the solar rays has indirectly a protective effect, because when you look down into the water from above it appears dark, whereas when you look up from below the surface appears bright and shining; so that a fish is less likely to be observed (and eaten) if his back is dark and his under surface white and silvery.

Albino soles are far rarer than doubles, and seldom occur except in very young and foolish specimens. Naturally an albino forms an exceptionally sure mark for his enemies to hawk at, and he is therefore usually devoured at an early stage of his unhappy existence, before he has time to develop properly into a good specimen. For the same reason adult white rabbits are very rare in the wild state, because they form such excellent targets for owls in their early infancy. Rabbits, when tamed, as we all know, tend to 'sport' in colour to a surprising extent; but this tendency is repressed in the wild condition by the selective action of the common owl, which promptly picks off every rabbit that doesn't harmonise well in the dusk of evening with the bracken and furze among whose stalks it feeds.

All the flat-fish are carnivorous. They live chiefly off cockles and other mollusks, off lugs and lobworms, or off small shrimp-like creatures and other crustaceans. In summer time soles resort to banks and shallow spots near the mouths of rivers to deposit their spawn. They are obliged to do this in shallow waters, because, like most other fish, they are very unnatural mothers, and leave the sun to do the whole work of hatching for them. To be sure there are some few right-minded fish which take a proper view of their parental responsibilities, such as the pipe-fishes, which carry about their unhatched eggs in a bag, sometimes borne by the affectionate mother, but oftener still by the good father, a perfect model to his human *confrères*. Or again, the familiar little stickleback, who builds a regular nest for the reception of the spawn, and positively sits upon it like a hen, at the same time waving his fins vigorously backwards and forwards so as to keep up a good supply of oxygen. But soles and most other fish consider that their parental duties are quite at an end as soon as they have deposited their spawn in safety on a convenient sunny shallow.

This fact produces a sort of annual migration among the soles and other flat-fish. In spring, when all nature is beginning to wake again from its winter sleep, the soles seek the shoal water,

which forms their spawning ground; and, therefore, in April, May, June, and July, the British sole is chiefly trawled for off the Dogger Bank and the other great submerged flats of the North Sea. But when November comes on again the soles once more retire for the season into winter quarters in the deep water for the purpose of hibernating during the foodless period. The North Sea soles (in whose habits and manners the London public is most profoundly interested) generally resort for their long snooze to a deep depression known as the Silver Pits, lying close beside the Dogger Bank. These Silver Pits are so called because when they were first discovered (about the year 1843) they formed a sort of Big Bonanza for the lucky fishermen who originally resorted to them. There the soles lay, huddled together for the sake of warmth, like herrings in a barrel, thousands and thousands of them, one on top of the other, a solid mass of living and sleeping solehood, only waiting for the adventurous fisherman to pull them up and take them to market. Man, treacherous man, crept upon their peaceful slumber unawares, and proceeded, like Macbeth, to murder sleep wholesale in the most unjustifiable and relentless manner. He dropped his lines into the Silver Pits—the water there is too deep for dredging—and hauled up the hapless drowsy creatures literally by the thousand till he had half exhausted the accumulated progeny of ages. The Silver Pits are still excellent winter fishing grounds, but never again will they yield such immense fortunes as they did at the moment of their first exploration.

In 1848, when the Californian gold fever was at its very height, some other lucky smack-owners hit upon a second deposit of solid soles, lying in layers on a small tract of coarse bottom near Flamborough Head, where they retired to hibernate, perhaps, in consequence of the hard treatment they had received in the Silver Pits. This new Eldorado of the fishing industry was appropriately nick-named California, because it proved for the time being a very mine of gold to its fortunate discoverers. But, like the prototypal California on the Pacific coast, its natural wealth was soon exhausted; and though it still yields a fair proportion of fish, its golden days are now fairly over.

Driven from the banks and pits by their incessant enemy, the trawler, the poor soles have now taken to depositing their spawn on the rough, rocky ground where the fishermen dare not follow them for fear of breaking their nets against the jagged ledges.

These rocky spots are known as sanctuaries, and if it were not for them it is highly probable that sole *au gratin* would soon become an extinct animal on our London dinner tables. Even to the sanctuaries, however, they are rudely followed, as Professor Huxley has shown, by their hereditary fishy foes, who eat the spawn, and so deprive the world of myriads upon myriads of unborn soles, consigned before their time to dull oblivion. Formerly, fishermen used to throw away these useless fish when caught; in future, they have strict orders from the inspectors of fisheries to kill them all wherever found.

However, even the remnant left by all enemies put together is quite sufficient to repeople the waters with a pleuronectid population with extraordinary rapidity. The fecundity of fish is indeed something almost incredible. The eggs of soles are extremely small—not so big as a grain of mustard seed—and the roe of a one-pound fish usually contains as many as 134,000 of them. Turbot are even more surprisingly prolific: Frank Buckland was acquainted with one whose roe weighed 5 lbs. 9 oz., and contained no less than fourteen million and odd eggs. It is a sad reflection that not more than one of these, on an average, ever lives to reach maturity. For if only two survived in each case the number of turbot in the sea next year would be double what it is this; the year after that there would be four times as many; the next year eight times again; and so on in a regular arithmetical progression. In a very few decades the whole sea would become one living mass of solid turbot. As a matter of fact, since the number of individuals in any given species remains on the average exactly constant, we may lay it down as a general rule that only two young usually survive to maturity out of all those born or laid by a single pair of parents. All the rest are simply produced in order to provide for the necessary loss in infant mortality. The turbot lays fourteen million eggs, well knowing that thirteen million nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine will be eaten up in the state of spawn or devoured by enemies in helpless infancy, or drifted out to sea and hopelessly lost, or otherwise somehow unaccounted for. The fewer the casualties to which a race is exposed the smaller the number of eggs or young which it needs to produce in order to cover the necessary losses.

In fish generally it takes at least a hundred thousand eggs each year to keep up the average of the species. In frogs and

other amphibians, a few hundred are amply sufficient. Reptiles often lay only a much smaller number. In birds, which hatch their own eggs and feed their young, from ten to two eggs per annum are quite sufficient to replenish the earth. Among mammals, three or four at a birth is a rare number, and many of the larger sorts produce one calf or foal at a time only. In the human race at large, a total of five or six children for each married couple during a whole lifetime makes up sufficiently for infant mortality and all other sources of loss, though among utter savages a far higher rate is usually necessary. In England, an average of four and a half children to each family suffices to keep the population stationary; above that number it begins to increase, and has to find an outlet in emigration. If every family had four children, and every child grew up to maturity and married, the population would exactly double in every generation. Even making allowances for necessary deaths and celibacy, however, I believe that as sanitation improves and needless infant mortality is done away with, the human race will finally come to a state of equilibrium with an average of three children to each household. But this is getting very far away indeed from the habits of flat-fishes.



COURT ROYAL.

A STORY OF CROSS CURRENTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'JOHN HERRING,' 'MEHALAH,' ETC.

CHAPTER XLI.

AN ENTANGLEMENT.

WHEN Charles Cheek came next evening to see his father, he found the old man in a condition of excitement such as made his heart sink, and despair of extracting money from him. He came at his father's dinner-time, knowing the impossibility of getting a conversation with him during business hours.

'Are you unwell, father?' he asked, when he observed the perturbed condition of the old man.

'Unwell? Cause to be so.'

'What is the matter with you?'

'Matter? Everything.'

'Any annoyance lately?'

'Annoyance? Ugh!'

What was it that troubled the old man? During dinner he would hardly speak. His pasty face exuded a gloss. He growled, and cast furtive glances at his son, which Charles caught, and was unable to interpret.

'Was Mr. Worthivale here yesterday, governor?'

'Worthivale? Yes. Has a son, never gave him an hour's uneasiness. Came crowing and flapping here because he has a good son.'

'Do you mean, father, that—that——'

'That—that! Yes. Ugh!'

It was impossible to extract anything from the old man during the meal. Charles put on a gay manner, and talked of the weather, of politics, of the regiments ordered abroad, of the depression, of the gossip of society, the improvements effected in torpedoes, Devonshire cream, the Prince of Wales, butterine,

Nihilism, Robert Browning, anything, everything that came into his head, but without provoking his father to take part in the conversation.

As soon, however, as the dessert was on the table—the same dessert as the day before—the father drew the dish of raisins and almonds over to himself, waved the servants to withdraw, and burst forth with, ‘So—so—clapping the cross on top of St. Paul’s! brought your folly to a climax at last. Ugh!’

‘What have I done?’ asked Charles, as his spirit quaked at his father’s anger, and his consciousness of having deserved it. ‘I know I am not as clever as you are, governor, but—you have put matters more forcibly than pleasantly.’

‘What have you done? Look at this! Ugh!’

The old man flung a note across the table at him, then made a grab at the almonds, filled his hand, and began to eat them ravenously.

Charles took a letter out of the envelope, unfolded it leisurely, and proceeded to read. He expected to find that his tailor or wine merchant had appealed to his father for payment of a long-standing account. What he saw made the colour rush to his face, and turn him scarlet to the roots of his hair. He glanced up, and saw that his father had riveted his dark piercing eyes on him, whilst he ate savagely almond after almond. The letter was as follows:—

‘Honoured and monokeratic Sir,—I take my pen in hand, hoping that this finds you as it leaves me. Sir, I feel that I can have no peace of mind till I make you acquainted with our engagement, that is, the engagement of me and Charlie, and ask your blessing on our approaching union. When Charlie told me he wished I was his wife, you might have knocked me down with a feather, I was that taken aback. I could do no other than give consent, seeing he had behaved so handsome to me, in giving me a necklace of pearls and a beautiful rose-coloured silk gown (which, I am grieved to say, through no fault of mine, has since been injured by Ems water). Charlie and I have been cabined together, holding hands as agreed and acknowledged lovers, and we only await your blessing, honoured and monokeratic sir, to become the happiest of couples. Charlie has gone up to town to break the news to you, and to solicit your approval. He will tell you of our long attachment, and

assure you of my best intentions to love and honour you as a daughter, the which (in prospective) I beg to subscribe myself,
'JOANNA ROSEVERE.

'C/o Mr. Lazarus,
'The Golden Balls,
'Barbican.

'P.S.—I will send you our united cabinet as soon as the proof comes, which I trust will be to-morrow.'

Charles Cheek's first sensation was amazement; then he felt disposed to laugh. The letter was so droll, so impertinent, and so inferior in style to what he expected from Joe. But all inclination to laugh was taken from him by his father's countenance. The old man was simmering with anger and apprehension.

'Thought so!' burst forth Mr. Cheek as he stretched his arms so suddenly and violently as to knock over one of the wine-glasses. 'I always feared it would come to this. I hoped against hope. I did trust you would be preserved by Providence from plunging into such an abyss of imbecility.'

'My dear father, you take this too seriously.'

'Take it too seriously!' echoed the old man. 'What is more serious than marriage?'

'But, my dear governor!'

'Don't governor me. I'm your father, I presume, though God forgive me for begetting such an ass.'

The young man was hurt and incensed. His father loved him, but he was rough with him, and had no self-restraint when angered. He spoke coarsely, brutally, all the coarse and brutal things that came off his heart, which is never done by those who have been put through the mill of culture.

How much the old man loved him, how proud he was of him in spite of his weakness, in spite of the disappointment his pride had encountered, this Charles did not know. Mr. Cheek made no show of affection; or he showed it by licking his cub with a very rough tongue, so rough as to flay him.

'Well!' shouted the old man, 'well!'

'The letter is preposterous,' said Charlie, sulkily.

'Preposterous! What I find preposterous is not the letter, but the conduct that provoked the letter.'

'It is not true—it is a hoax,' said the young man.

'Not true!' repeated the old man. He had eaten all the

COURT ROYAL.

almonds; now he took a bunch of raisins, put it in his mouth, and passionately tore off the fruit with one nip of his teeth, and put the spray on his plate. When he had gulped down the raisins he said, 'Not true! oh no. Cap imbecility with falsehood. Now deny everything. I thought I had a son who was a fool; don't convince me that he is a liar and a coward as well.'

The young man stood up. He turned pale. 'You are my father,' he said, 'and have some privilege of language; but this exceeds what I will endure. I had rather break stones on the road than submit to such insults.'

'Rejoice to see you break stones—do any useful work. At present breaking your father's heart.'

The old man's voice shook.

Charles was moved. 'My dear father,' he said, 'let me explain.'

'Explain! What can you explain?'

'The letter is not serious.'

'Reads deuced like a serious letter.' Mr. Cheek had no sense of humour. What touched his son as comical in the epistle appeared to him sober earnestness. 'Answer me a few plain questions, Charles; set my mind at rest, or confirm my worst anticipations. Give me the letter.'

The old tradesman took the note and spread it before him, then deliberately put on his spectacles and read the letter over to himself, marking the points with his silver dessert knife.

'Who is Joanna Rosevere?'

'She is a girl I got to know something about; a nice enough sort of a girl, with plenty of brains——'

'That will do. I asked who was Joanna Rosevere. You say a girl. Enough. Now I know she is not a widow. I want none of your lover's raptures.'

'I am not aware that there were any raptures.'

'That will do. I require answers short and to the point. Now, further, is it true that you gave her a pearl necklace and a rose-coloured silk dress?'

'Yes, I did; the pearls were Roman, and the dress——'

'That will do. You gave this girl a necklace of Roman pearls and a rose-coloured silk gown. Did you further have yourself photographed—I beg pardon, cabined—hand-in-hand with her?'

'Yes, father. The fact is that—that——' Then the recollection

of the snail and the bet rushed on his mind, he blushed and did not finish his sentence.

‘Very well—or rather, very ill. You were photographed—to be exact, cabineted with the girl, hand-in-hand; I presume I take her right, she don’t swear you were closeted with her.’

‘Well, I was taken with her. I thought——’

‘Never mind what you thought. I want facts, not fancies. Hand-in-hand, cabinet size. I want to know further, did you, as she says, tell her you wished her to be your wife?’

‘It came about like this. The other evening when I was there——’

‘I am not asking the time of day, nor the circumstances. I ask only, is this a fact?’

‘I did say that I wished it were possible for me to make her Mrs. Charles Cheek, or words to that effect. I don’t recollect the exact expression.’

‘Very well. You asked her to be Mrs. Charles Cheek, but the exact words in which you couched your proposal you do not recollect.’

‘It was not a proposal.’

‘Not a proposal!’ repeated the father. ‘Then what am I to conclude from the present of the necklace of Roman pearls and the rose-coloured silk dress, and the cabinet-sized photograph of yourselves clasping each other’s hands? Will you illumine my mind, and tell me, do young gentlemen and young women get carted, and closeted, and cabineted, hand-in-hand, unless engaged?’

‘There is no engagement,’ protested Charles, bewildered and angry.

‘No engagement! You dare to say that. Don’t repeat it, as you desire to retain a particle of my regard. I ask, further, what is this Joanna? I know she is a girl. In what capacity is she at the Golden Balls with Mr. Lazarus, whom I happen to know?’

‘She is maid of all work to the old Jew pawnbroker,’ answered the young man, driven to desperation, and regardless what he admitted.

‘Maid of all work to a Jew pawnbroker,’ repeated his father.

‘I ask beside, whence comes she? Is she a Jewess?’

‘No, she is not.’

‘Whence comes she?’

'Picked out of the mud, and^e pawned for ten shillings,' exclaimed Charles Cheek in a paroxysm of exasperation.

'Picked out of the mud. What mud?'

'The mud of Sutton Pool.'

'Pawned for ten shillings. By whom?'

'By her mother.'

'And this is the creature you are going to take to you as wife!' exclaimed the old man, with repressed anger, his face livid and syrupy with emotion. 'With a creature such as this you will squander my hard-earned wealth!'

'I tell you, father, it is a hoax.'

'Don't tell me that.' Mr. Cheek brought his great fist down on the table with a crash that made the decanters leap and the glasses spin. 'Now, sir, do you mean to marry her? If you do, I cast you off utterly and for ever.'

'No, I don't want to do that. I tell you the letter is a hoax. Read it—you can see by the style that it is.'

'I have read it. I can see as well as you. I am not to be hoodwinked, and to be told that red is green, and the moon is cheese, and believe it. I have listened patiently to your explanation. You have so compromised yourself with this girl, on your own admission, that if you fail, you render yourself actionable for breach of promise.'

'There was no promise,' persisted the young man.

'Is a jury likely to believe that, when they have heard of the pearls and the rose silk, and seen the billing and cooing doves in the cabinet? I tell you they will assess the damages at a thousand pounds.'

'There was no agreement. It is a mistake. I can't think what Joanna was at writing such a letter.'

'Do you want to marry her?' asked his father.

'No, of course not. I never did. I only said something about making her Mrs. Charles Cheek in joke.'

'The joke is likely to be expensive pleasantry. But it was no joke. You neither of you regarded it as joke, or you would not have been photographed together. Now you come to me to get you out of this predicament. I won't have the scandal of a case of breach of promise in the papers. It might affect my business. We must come to an accommodation. How old is the girl?'

'Seventeen or eighteen.'

‘Has she relations to advise her?’

‘Not one.’

‘There is, however, that fox, Lazarus.’

‘She will never consult him.’

‘What will she take to let you off? I dare say if I go down with a hundred pounds in my pocket, and offer it her with one hand, and a written renunciation of you in the other, before she has had time to consider and ask advice, she will sign, and set you free.’ He looked questioningly at his son.

A change had come over Charles’s face. A light had sprung up before him. He leaned back in his chair, and burst into a fit of laughter.

‘It is no laughing matter,’ said the elder Cheek, grimly. ‘This may cost us a thousand. Juries estimate damages by the income of the father-in-law. Deuced lucky you will be if I can clear you for a hundred. You know the girl: will she take a hundred?’

‘I am sure she will. Give me the money, and let me go down to Plymouth and settle it with her.’

‘No,’ answered the father, ‘you are too weak. The job must be done by me at once. Let me see—to-morrow: impossible; engaged. Must make arrangements. Day after, yes; and, Charles, you go to Mr. Worthivale at Kingsbridge for a month, or better, six weeks, to be out of the way. He comes here to dinner to-morrow, when I will settle with him. Go.’

When Charles Cheek got into the street he exploded into laughter. ‘The little rogue!’ he exclaimed. ‘Who ever would have thought it? The hundred pounds she promised she gets out of my father. She has cost me a bad quarter of an hour, though.’

CHAPTER XLII.

NIBBLING.

NEXT evening, punctually at seven, Mr. Worthivale arrived. To honour his presence, two additional dishes were added to the dessert—one of dried figs, the other of preserved ginger. Also a bottle of claret was decanted. Mr. Cheek had not settled down into his usual composure; his excitement made him more talkative than usual, and induced him to fill out his sentences, and not present them in a somewhat less truncated shape. His talkative-

ness, however, did not manifest itself until after the servants had withdrawn. Then his reserve gave way. He pulled an envelope out of his pocket and threw it to his guest.

'Look at that, Worthivale! Got it this morning. Charles has made a fool of himself. Got entangled with a wench dredged from the social depths. Engaged! Cost something to set him free. However'—he rattled his pocket—'I'm not like one of your dukes; I've money in my own pocket when there's need. I haven't to go cap in hand to others.'

The steward winced. Then he said, studying the photograph, 'I am sure I know that face. It is familiar to me. Where can I have seen it?'

'Of course. That is Charlie.'

'Yes; but the other—the girl? She—it must be, yet I can hardly believe it—it must be our servant, Joanna!'

'Joanna is her name.'

'The maid left us under somewhat unsatisfactory circumstances—altogether puzzling.'

'That I can well believe.'

'She had been before with a Mrs. Delany.'

'She is now with a Jew pawnbroker, as maid of all work.'

'This must be broken off,' said Mr. Worthivale. 'I never quite made out the why and wherefore of her leaving my house. She ran away.'

'I am going to buy her off,' answered Mr. Cheek; 'but what comfort is that to me, when my boy may be committing a similar folly again to-morrow?'

Mr. Worthivale was still considering the photograph.

'Her face is striking,' he said, 'and she has eyes that sparkle; they are perfectly effervescing with intelligence. Beavis took against her; he suspected her from the outset, but I cannot say why. This is a very odd story. Your son's acquaintance with her must be short. She left us at Christmas. She was clever, but unable to read and write.'

'She wrote me a letter. I have it in my pocket—here it is. Almost ashamed, however, to let you see it.'

Mr. Worthivale looked at the letter. 'I know about the pink silk dress,' he said. 'She had it when she came to us. It was spoiled, as she describes in this letter, by some mineral water getting spilled over it. The Roman pearls also—yes. She sent them to Lady Grace Eveleigh after her disappearance. Lucy told

me of it. They came with a letter, but I supposed she had got some one to write it for her. The girl is not lost to good; she showed great respect and attachment to her ladyship. Perhaps this letter was written for her; and yet'—he mused,—'yet there were some odd circumstances about her departure which made Beavis think her ignorance simulated.'

'Did she steal anything from your house?'

'No, I cannot say we missed money or plate; in fact, nothing. No, I cannot charge her with that.'

'Sorry for that,' said old Cheek. 'It would have made my course easier. Police case then.'

'Your son must in no case marry such a person,' said the steward, gravely. 'It would be an ugly scandal.'

'He shall not. I buy her off. Allow the boy to visit you for a month or so till this affair is blown over.'

'Certainly. I will bring him into good society. The company of Beavis will be profitable. I may find means of introducing him to the Marquis and Lord Ronald. There are nice people in our neighbourhood. There are the Sheepwashes—some fine girls, much admired, and of good family. Who can tell? Charles may form an attachment for one of them, and so get his foot into society. They have not much of their own except blood, and that is just what you require.'

'Nothing would please me better.'

'Yes, we must get Charles into good society, and then he will lose the taste for low associations.'

'The boy has his points,' said Mr. Cheek. 'Can't help loving him. Admire his gentlemanly ways. Got them from his mother. Your family have always been gentlefolks.'

'Yes; we were squires once, in Cornwall, but lost our property in the usual way, and went down into business.'

Then Mr. Worthivale turned the conversation to the Kingsbridge estates, and the advantages of lending money on them. He admitted that the Duke was in want of a few thousands, but then the investment was so secure. Turkish Government, Egyptian Khedives, Argentine Republics borrowed and could not pay. They were broken reeds, but an English duke was a pillar of strength. It would not be a bad excuse for introducing Charles to the family, if his father was inclined to accommodate it. At this bold proposition Mr. Cheek grew stiff, congealed, and frowned. The steward went on, now he had begun, unabashed, to show the great securities

the duke could offer, the advantages from a pecuniary point of view that would accrue to Mr. Cheek by thus investing his money. Mr. Cheek listened, and said nothing in reply one way or the other.

‘There are a couple of mortgages that have been notified which must be met, amounting to about fifty thousand,’ he said. ‘If you would take these over, it would be a convenience to the family, you would have a safe investment, and you would have conferred on them an obligation which they would not forget.’

‘Fifty thousand!’ said Mr. Cheek. ‘I have more than that to dispose of, thank goodness; the Monokeratic Principle continues to bring in a good profit annually, and I must invest what I make somewhere and somehow.’

‘Really,’ said the steward, ‘a hundred thousand would not come amiss.’

‘Ah!’ exclaimed Cheek senior, ‘go on, hundred and fifty-two hundred—two hundred and fifty——’

‘You do not hear me out. A couple of mortgages must be transferred or paid off. The Duke has not the ready money, and he would therefore wish the transfer. The one is on the manor of Kingsbridge, the other on the Court Royal estate. Why, the house itself cost seventy thousand—there is absolutely no risk.’

‘If I were to take these over, it would be merely because I do not see my way at present to a better investment. When I do see one I shall call them up. I don’t care for your four and half and four and three quarters. If I were to take these mortgages, your people would be put in the same box in a few years’ time when I wanted to release my capital.’

‘Oh, in two or three years that can be done without difficulty. The Duke only requires accommodation for the moment.’

‘Whence will the money come?’

‘Don’t trouble your head about that. Money can always be found with such estates. Why, they bring in forty thousand per annum.’

‘Land can always be sold,’ said Cheek. ‘If the money be not forthcoming when I want it, I will sell them up, or they must drop a farm or two into the market.’

‘I’ll tell you what, Cheek. If it ever comes to that, try and secure Bigbury. That is the site for a second Torquay, climate warm as Penzance, and not as rainy; looks south, scenery lovely, Plymouth accessible. He who has capital, and likes to spend it

there, can realise in no time an enormous fortune. Come, what do you say to my proposal? You have a friend at court in me, who knows all the advantages.'

Mr. Cheek rubbed his nose with his fork, wherewith he had been eating preserved ginger, and left a trickle of juice upon it.

'I should like to see the place,' he said cautiously.

'Come down, then.'

Suddenly Cheek jerked forwards his arms, and said, 'I will.'

'And as I return to-morrow, I can take Charles with me, and get him settled in. I expect to see the agent for the mortgagee on the twenty-third at my place. Suppose you are there to meet him. Then nothing is more easy than a transfer.'

'I go down to Plymouth to-morrow to settle this unpleasant matter of the girl. We can travel together.'

'Then return by way of Kingsbridge.'

'Cannot. Must be in town by night express, but by Wednesday I'll be with you.'

Mr. Worthivale was delighted, the fish was nibbling and nigh hooked.

Neither spoke for some minutes, as each was engaged with his own thoughts and with drinking port.

Presently Mr. Cheek said, as he dipped his napkin in his finger-glass and wiped the syrup off his nose, 'I wish you would tell me what was suspicious about that girl who has entangled Charles. If she has done anything to make her afraid of being found out, I might give her a scare, and bring her to an humble frame of mind. A knowledge of particulars will help me.'

The steward then related the circumstances.

'Beavis caught her making an analysis of the accounts!' exclaimed Mr. Cheek. 'Why, the thing is improbable on the face of it. What could such a girl want with it?'

'Nothing, that I can see. I said so to Beavis, but Beavis was very positive. She had the books out, she must have searched my pockets to get the key, and she had her head resting on the extracts she had taken. When Beavis roused her, she knocked over the lamp, and slipped her notebook away in the dark.'

'Did Beavis question her?'

'No; she bolted.'

'Bolted at once?'

'Yes; she did not wait to be questioned.'

'And she went——'

'We did not trace her. We had no idea whither she had betaken herself.'

'Now you know. She is with a Jew. Probably went straight to him. I know the man. He is a money-lender as well as a pawnbroker. There was a time when he helped me. Charles has been in his clutches before now. A dangerous man, worth more than you would fancy. Has he any interest in the affairs of the Duke?'

'None whatever.'

'Who are the holders of the mortgages? Have you their names? Are any Jews among them?'

'Yes, several.'

'Bad,' said Cheek. 'The Jews play into each other's hands, hook on to each other like the links of a fetter.'

'You do not mean to connect the act of the girl with the mortgages?'

'I should not be surprised. I find no other explanation. Beavis thinks so, probably. She came to you pretending inability to read and write?'

'Yes.'

'The girl is no ordinary girl,' said Mr. Cheek, uneasily. 'I doubt if she will let off Charles as cheap as a hundred pounds. I must inquire into this matter. Must see Lazarus. Haven't seen or smelt him for years.'

'I don't see what Lazarus has to do with the matter. The girl came to me from Mrs. Delany. I suppose that after leaving me, and having no character, she was forced to take what situation she could.'

'Charles can tell us. I hear his voice in the hall. He must have known her before she went to you if she had the silk dress and beads in your house.—Charles,' he said as his son entered, 'catechising continued.'

The young man had recovered his buoyancy.

'By all means, father, but not in public.'

'Want to know whether that person you were talking of with me yesterday has been long in present situation.'

'All her life,' answered Charles, promptly. 'That is, since she was twelve years old.'

'Was she ever in service with a Mrs. Delany?'

'Wife of Colonel Delany,' explained Mr. Worthivale.

'Not to my knowledge; certainly not recently.'

'Where was she before Christmas?' asked the steward.

'That I cannot say. Possibly then she may have been at the Colonel's, but I do not know.'

'Where was she before that?' asked his father.

'On November the fifth she was at the Barbican, where she had been since childhood. She was away till Christmas, and then returned, and has been there ever since.'

Cheek looked at Worthivale and shook his head.

'Sent,' he said.

CHAPTER XLIII.

'SHARES?'

TIME was money to Mr. Cheek. He did not allow the grass to grow under his feet. Consequently, on reaching Plymouth he went at once to the Golden Balls. Mr. Cheek was a clear as well as a hard-headed man; he was a rapid thinker, and prompt in forming and acting on his decisions. He was one of those conquering men who conquer because dominated by self-assurance. He was headstrong and intolerant, because he was incapable of seeing from any other standpoint than his own, and of allowing that any other view was admissible. These are the heroes who have the world at their feet. What he willed he had always been able to carry out, because he cared for no one who opposed him. The public was the ass on which he had ridden ever since he began business. He knew perfectly its moods and maladies. He was indifferent to its wants, save so far as they affected him and helped in his business. Humbug was with him a form of advertisement—a means to an end. He was not himself a humbug, he was even brutally straightforward, but the public demanded cant of the man who posed before them as a politician, a preacher, or a trader, and Mr. Cheek donned it. In his domestic relations he was truthful, honest, and direct; in his relations with the public he was perfectly unscrupulous. He had a code of ethics for dealings within his home circle, but that home circle was limited now, it was contained within his waistband; he had none at all for dealings outside. He was a hard man, but he had a tender point—love for and pride in his son, a love that met with little response because ill-expressed, and a pride that met with rude shocks. He was an ambitious man. For long his ambition had

been to make money. Now he was ambitious to make Charles a gentleman. But he did not know how to set about it. He had sent him, as a boy, to private schools, and, despising the classics, had refused to put him at an university. From dread of losing him from under his eye, he had opposed his going into the army; now he was conscious that he had made a mistake, but too proud to admit it. He was angry with society for not taking up Charles into it. Why should it not? Every day he heard of society letting down its net and drawing it up into its heaven, like the sheet of St. Peter's vision, full of all sorts of strange beasts. Why was not Charles accepted? If society would not take up Charles, society must be cut down to his level.

He entered the shop of the Golden Balls with firm tread, and with his usual brusque and determined manner. Joanna was there. Towards dusk more business was done than at other times of the day. One gas jet was flaring near her head, accentuating her features. Mr. Cheek did not care in the least whether she was good-looking or the reverse. He looked at her no more than to satisfy himself that this was the same girl who had been photographed with his son.

'Your name is Joanna Rosevere,' he said.

Joanna stood up at once, and turned the gas so as to throw the light full on his face, and off her own.

'And you,' she said quietly—'you are Mr. Cheek of the Monokeratic Principle.'

'I received a letter from you on the 12th instant.'

'Which I posted on the 11th instant.'

'You have not a leg to stand on,' said Mr. Cheek, roughly.

'My son is a fool, but not such a fool as to propose to make you his wife. He swears he never asked you.'

She made no reply, but stood opposite him with her hands on the counter, her face in shadow, studying him.

'Now look here,' he said further: 'in an amicable way I don't mind squaring off. If you choose to fight, I'm your man, with thousands at my disposal, and quite prepared to chuck away thousands in law. What do you say?'

'Nothing.'

'Perhaps you suppose that law in England is made for the purpose of redressing wrongs. No such thing. Law is made for the maintenance of lawyers. Justice is sold in England, and he with the longest purse wins; he can appeal from court to court,

and ruin his adversary. You have nothing. What lawyer will look at you? Now—are you disposed for a compromise?’

‘I will take a hundred pounds.’

‘A hundred cocoa-nuts!’ scoffed Mr. Cheek. ‘Say five-and-twenty, and I will listen to you.’

‘I have named the sum,’ answered Joanna, and reseated herself, took up her sewing, and proceeded with it as if nothing had interrupted her. Mr. Cheek watched her thread a needle. Her hand did not shake.

‘You will get nothing if you refuse my offer.’

She made no answer, but continued stitching.

‘Charles is ashamed of himself already for having even spoken to you. What are you? A gutter girl.’

‘Lower than that, sir,’ exclaimed Joanna, without raising her head. ‘The gutters empty into Sutton Pool, and I came out of the blackest mud in the bottom of the pool.’

‘Charles has not a penny of his own.’

‘He has less than a penny, sir. He is in debt.’

‘Will you give him up?’

‘You know my terms.’

He stood watching her, puzzled at and admiring her self-possession.

‘Very well,’ he said, thrusting a hundred-pound note across the counter with one hand, and a paper with the other. ‘Sign this, and you shall have the money.’

She stood up, dipped the desk pen in ink, and appended her signature to the renunciation of her claims. Then she reseated herself, having taken the bank note, with an involuntary sigh, folded it, and put it in her bosom.

‘So—you, who could not read nor write at Mr. Worthivale’s, can read what is penned here, and sign your name to it in a bold hand—the same hand that wrote to me on the 11th instant.’

Joanna looked up at him in surprise.

‘I know all about it. Mr. Worthivale is a sort of relation, and has told me. What took you to him with forged testimonials, eh? Both you and the lady who gave the character have become actionable. Aware of that, eh?’

Joanna made no reply.

‘What took you there?’

‘I was sent,’ she answered.

‘I said so—sent by Lazarus.’

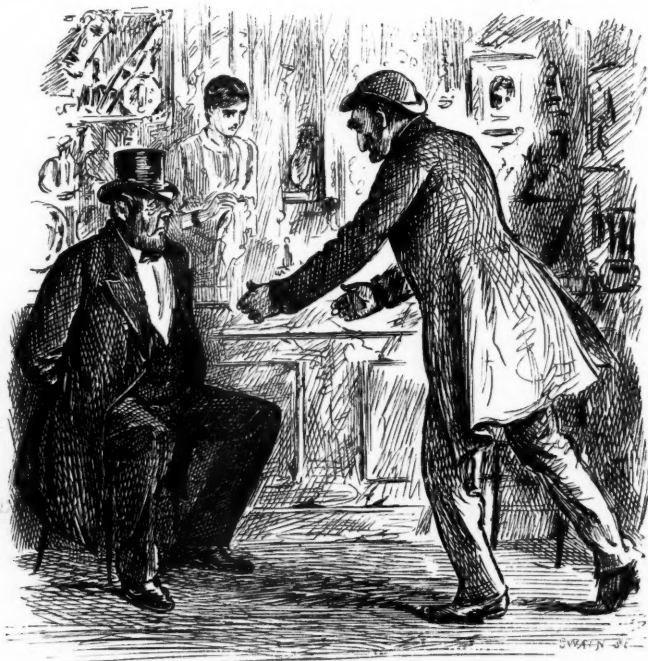
She did not answer.

‘Why did you examine the books and make extracts from them? Was that what Lazarus sent you there for, eh?’

She remained silent.

‘Never mind. Always make a cat squeak by pinching its tail. Make you speak. Where is Lazarus?’

‘He is not at home, sir. He will be here directly. Take a chair.’



Mr. Cheek did so. Just then, in came a woman with a Britannia metal teapot, milk jug, and sugar bowl, which she wanted to dispose of.

Mr. Cheek listened to the disputation over its value, to the remorseless way in which Joanna pointed out its defects, the way in which she flouted the poor woman when she named a reasonable sum as that which she demanded for them, the battle fought over a few pence when the shillings were settled, and the

ignominious rout of the seller. As he listened Mr. Cheek's interest was quickened. He looked more attentively at the girl, and observed her keen face and brilliant eyes. 'She is no fool,' he said to himself. 'I wish I had her in my shop. She'd be worth pounds to me.'

Then in came Lazarus. Mr. Cheek gave him a nod. The Jew recognised him, uttered a cry of admiration, and rushed at him with both hands extended. Mr. Cheek at once put his hands under his coat-tails, and repelled Lazarus with a look.

'A word with you,' said he, 'in your den.'

Lazarus bowed and pointed the way. Cheek knew the passage and the room well enough, though many years had passed since he had seen them.

'Take a sedan, sir,' begged the Jew, bowing at every comma. 'You will find it easy, cuts off the draught on all sides, sir. I will sit on my bed, my dear Mr. Cheek. Lord! what pleasure to see an old customer again! I hear affairs are flourishing with you, Mr. Cheek. I hear golden tidings of you, sir; and to think I had a hand in the making of you! Well, humble instruments, sir! very humble.'

'A hand in the undoing of my son, if in the making of me,' said Mr. Cheek, grimly. 'Which latter proposition I dispute.'

'No sudden embarrassment? Want a helping hand over a stile?' inquired Lazarus, fawningly.

'No such luck for you,' answered Mr. Cheek.

'Then how may I meet your wishes?'

'I am about,' said Mr. Cheek, pompously, 'to make large investments in mortgages on the property of a great duke in these parts, his Grace of Kingsbridge. I understand that he is in immediate need of a considerable sum; and as I have my tens and hundreds of thousands at command, I am inclined to lend him what he wants on the security of some of his estates. Now'—suddenly—'what have you to do with the Duke's affairs? You sent that clever girl outside to Court Royal to pry into and find out how the Duke's books stood. What is your stake?'

Lazarus was so startled that he could not speak. He sat with open mouth and eyes, staring at his visitor.

'Know all about it,' said Mr. Cheek, coolly. 'Steward is my relation. He and your girl out there have told me all but one thing. What is your interest in the Kingsbridge estates?'

Lazarus pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his face.

'You—you are going to lend money to the Duke!' he exclaimed. 'I did not suppose you such a gull. Do you know that his land is mortgaged to its full value in times like these? It is a bad business. Do not soil your fingers with it.'

'Can take care of myself. Want no advice,' said Mr. Cheek, unmoved.

'You are bewildered and befooled by aristocratical hocus-pocus. I've seen the sort of thing done on a platform with a few passes, and a man loses his power of will. He does everything the electro-biologist orders. The Duke has made his passes over you—be on your guard. The case is hopeless.'

'What have you to do with the matter?'

'I—I? Oh yes! I have lent money. I have taken up a mortgage or two. I've burnt my fingers. Perhaps you would like to see what the burdens on the estate are. You shall see.'

He went to his closet and extracted a memorandum-book, and offered it to his visitor.

'Is this what was extracted by your girl?' asked Cheek.

Lazarus winced.

'I see your name nowhere here,' said the great trader.

'No—no—but I am there. What do you think of that? Is it ugly, or is it beautiful?'

'Very ugly indeed, for the Duke. Nevertheless, I don't see any great risk. I shall take over the two mortgages that have been called in.'

'Others are going to follow,' said the Jew. 'I have been to several of the mortgagees, who are my friends, belong to my race, and they are all stirring. Have you seen fowlers out wild-duck shooting when the winds drive the birds near shore? The men make a ring of boats and row inwards, driving the ducks and geese together till they start to fly, and then—bang! bang! bang! from all sides, and down they fall in hundreds. We'll bring down our ducal ducks. Will you join in the sport?'

Lazarus looked hard at his visitor, and Cheek measured him with his eyes.

'You are not moving out of love for the Duke?' said the Jew, derisively; 'not out of desire to uphold so grand a pillar of the constitution?'

'The Duke and the ducal family are nothing to me. I want their land.'

'Their land and residence; Court Royal, with its park.'

Lazarus laughed maliciously.

Cheek looked hard at him. 'And you—you would do the same?'

'Of course. I want their land. I want to smoke them out, smoke 'em out like foxes.'

'Lion this,' said Cheek, 'smoked by fox. Joking apart, what is your game? You want the land. You have an eye on Bigbury Bay, to make of that a second Torquay. You want to work the slate quarries and the petroleum shale. Bah! you have not the capital.'

'Look here,' said Lazarus; 'let us go shares. Your kinsman Worthivale has been deluding you with assurances of solvency. The family never can pay its debts. I will foreclose on Court Royal. Do not help them against me. Others will follow, they are all ready. It is like an avalanche; pop! and it shoots down and buries all below. You lie by and buy the land as we or the Duke sell. Pick it up bit by bit.'

'I shall go to Kingsbridge, and see the place.'

'Go, by all means. Then you will be a judge if fortunes are to be made there. Bigbury Bay—that a second Torquay! You must find the site first, and the shelter. Why, the fishermen stand on the cliffs, and angle off them into deep water. Will you dig out a city in the rocks, like Petra? Slate at Kingsbridge! We have slate more accessible to Plymouth than that. Oil shale!—it has been tried. Plenty of shale, but no oil. Or do you want to oust the great family, and settle into its nest? Lend them money, and you will be done. The Marquis will marry an heiress, and wash his debts away. You will get your money back, but you won't get into Court Royal.'

'You are eager to keep me off,' said Mr. Cheek. 'What is your stake?'

'Fifty thousand, mine. I lead the way; I am Mr. Emmanuel, with my thumb on Court Royal and Kingsbridge. Others are coming on, till the family is crushed.'

'Fifty thousand!'

'Yes. Do not let us fight. Let us share the spoil together.' Mr. Cheek made no reply. He was considering.

'You are going to Kingsbridge, eh?' said Lazarus. 'Be on your guard against the great people there. They do not regard you as belonging to the same order of creatures as themselves. They hold themselves a long way ahead of the like of us.'

‘The like of us!’ repeated Mr. Cheek, indignantly. ‘Don’t class yourself with me.’

‘They make use of us, squeeze us as lemons, and throw the rind away. If they think they will get money or information out of you they will be gracious enough. Your cousin Worthivale will give them a hint to use you well. They will dazzle you with their magnificence, condescend to you most graciously, stupefy your mind with admiration of their polish and amiability and urbanity, then, when they have made what they wanted out of you, they will slam the door in your face and pass you unnoticed in the street. Be on your guard. I have forewarned you. If you want them to remain amiable and gracious, you must have their thumbs in a vice.’

CHAPTER XLIV.

A STARTLING PROPOSAL.

THE serenity of security was gone from Court Royal. Though all went on there altered to the eye of the casual visitor, a change had passed over the house, like the touch of the first October frost on the park trees. And as the trees show their sensibility of coming winter in various tints, the maple turning crimson and the beech gold, the oak russet and the sycamore brown, so did the threat of impending ruin affect the various members of the household variously. Hitherto the house of Kingsbridge had been regarded as unbreakable as the Bank of England, as unsailable as the British constitution. Now the faith had received a shock so rude that it could never recover its childlike simplicity. The windows of heaven were open, the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and in the deluge what would survive? The ark had sprung a leak, and all the household were aware of it and restless. On every face a shadow had fallen. The members of the family talked each other into momentary encouragement, and then parted to fall back into despondency. The Duke was the least affected. After he had recovered the agitation into which he had been thrown by the paragraph in the society paper, he put the whole matter from him. He had known all his life that the estates were encumbered, he had known also all his life that this had not precluded him from spending money. Hitherto, when he needed it, money had been raised, it could be raised

again. There was always water in the well. The pump worked badly. The fault lay in Worthivale; he was old, and creaky, and clumsy.

Lord Ronald, on the other hand, worried himself with schemes for raising money. He came into his nephew's room every day with a new suggestion as impracticable as the last, and when Saltcombe threw cold water over it he visited the Archdeacon, in hopes of gaining encouragement from him. At table, before company and the servants, the General was cheerful, told his old stories, abused the new army regulations, wondered what the service was coming to, when the first necessity for advancement was to gain the favour of the newspaper reporters. He was less sanguine in his views than heretofore, that was the only evidence he gave in public that his mind was troubled.

Lord Edward remained at Court Royal, in spite of peremptory recalls from Lady Elizabeth, who insisted on his return to Sleepy Hollow, where cracks had appeared in the walls, and water was percolating through the roof, and the lamb-like curate was beginning to kick like a calf. Lord Edward saw that a crisis had arrived in the fate of the family, and he saw that his duty—the paramount duty—called him to remain at Court Royal. Where duties clashed the superior must be obeyed, and his duty to the family stood above all others.

The Marquis was altered since his return from Plymouth. The alteration was not in appearance only, it was also in manner. He had been hitherto agreeable in society, he was now silent. Nothing roused him out of his depression. Before he had been apathetic, now he was dispirited. He accepted the impending ruin as inevitable, and made no efforts to arrest it.

Beavis noticed the change and regretted it. The change was not for the better, but for the worse.

Only Lady Grace remained herself—cheerful, loving, trustful. She devoted herself more than ever to her brother, and, without appearing to observe his melancholy, combated it with all the weapons of her woman's wit. She forced him out of himself; she called her uncles and Lucy to her aid. Only when she was alone did the tears come into her eyes, and her brightness fade. Her brother was now her first concern, though she did not understand the occasion of his mood. She attributed it to despair of saving the family, consequent on the failure of his engagement to Dulcina Rigsby. Although she thought chiefly of him, she did not think

exclusively of him. She did not even know the main cause of trouble. She had resolved that some of the property must be sold, and that the establishment must be reduced. She dared to broach the subject to her father, in hopes of persuading him to realise the gravity of the occasion, but he refused to listen to her. 'My dear Grace,' he said, 'talk of what you understand. If you want any more gardenias—and the new sorts are very fine—order them. Tell Messrs. Veitch to send you a *Lapageria alba*; we have only the *rosea* in the greenhouse. But, my dear, not another word about matters concerning which you know nothing.'

Somehow—it is impossible to say how—the knowledge that the existing order was menaced had reached the servants' hall, and the greatest consternation prevailed. Mr. Blomfield and Mrs. Probus, the senior footmen, the coachman, and the lady's-maid of Lady Grace put their heads together, and concluded that the true remedy lay in a reduction of the establishment. Lord Ronald must go. Lord Edward must not be there so much, and he must not bring that 'drefful Lady Elizabeth, as is so mean, and pokes her nose into everything.'

'Far be it from me to suggest,' said Mr. Blomfield, 'that Lady Grace is not heartily welcome to all we have, and to the best of everything; still, her ladyship can't be kept on nothing. She really ought to be married and go. The Marquis is different. We must put up with him; he is the heir, and will be Dook some day.'

'But if you send away Lady Grace, I must go too,' argued the lady's-maid.

'Under those circumstances,' said the butler, 'we will make an effort, and keep her.'

Upstairs, at the same time, Lady Grace was with Lucy going over the list of servants.

'Dear Lucy, it is very painful. I can't bear to send one away, they are all so nice, and good, and obliging. It is not that I care for myself, but that I fear they will never get another place where they will all be so happy and comfortable together.'

Owing to the tension of spirits at the Court, Beavis and Charles Cheek were there a great deal. Charles had been introduced as the cousin of Beavis and Lucy, and as his manners were gentlemanly, and his conversation pleasant, and his spirits unflagging, he was a welcome guest. Neither he nor Mr. Worthivale had thought it necessary to mention his relations to the

monokeratic system, of which possibly the ducal family had never heard. Even if they had, Charles would have been received with perfect readiness as the kinsman of Lucy and her father. Lady Grace herself urged Beavis to bring his cousin whenever he could, to cheer the Marquis, and draw the minds of her uncles from the absorbing care.

Charles Cheek was very amusing; he was full of good stories, and had the tact to be agreeable without forcing himself into prominence. Indeed, he appeared at his best in this society. He knew what good manners were, and no one who saw him suspected the effort it was to him to maintain himself at ease among them. He was like a tight-rope dancer, who seems to be composed and assured on his cord aloft, but who knows himself to be safest and happiest when he is on the solid ground.

He showed sufficient deference to the rank and age of his Grace, and the General and the Archdeacon, to conciliate their favour. With the Marquis he was freer, though always respectful, and Lord Saltcombe said once or twice to Beavis that he liked his cousin, and hoped to see a good deal of him. He invited him to come in the shooting season, and placed his horses at his disposal for hunting. He was asked to take frequent strolls with Lady Grace, and Lucy and the Marquis, when Lord Saltcombe naturally fell to Lucy, and Charles to be companion to Lady Grace. These walks were delightful to Lucy, as her sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks testified. Lady Grace enjoyed them, for Charles was always amusing, sometimes interesting. He was a man with a good deal of shrewd observation of men and manners, which he used to good effect in conversation. Lady Grace had a sweet voice, thoroughly schooled, and as Charles sang well, with a mellow tenor, and knew his notes fairly, they practised duets together partly to please themselves, chiefly to give pleasure to the Duke.

The young man was sensible of the charms of Lady Grace; he had never before been in the society of a perfect English lady, and a perfect English lady is the noblest and most admirable of the products of centuries of refinement. The culture of the English lady is a culture of the entire woman, mind and soul, as well as of body, perfect refinement and exquisite delicacy in manner, in movement, in intonation, in thought, and in expression. No man can escape the attractions of such a woman; it seizes him, it raises him, it humbles him. It raises him by inspiring

him with the desire to be worthy to associate with such nobility; it humbles him by making him conscious of his own shortcomings.

Charles Cheek had been so little in the society of ladies of any sort, and was so ignorant of the ladies of the best English society, that this association with Lady Grace exercised over him quite irresistible fascination. He was uneasy when a day passed without his seeing her, and when out of her presence the recollection of her words, and the pleasant way in which she spoke them, formed his great delight. It can hardly be said that he loved her, it was certain that he worshipped her.

'Grace dear,' said Lucy one day to her friend, 'take care what you are about.'

'What do you mean, Lucy?'

'You are throwing your imperceptible threads round that simple young man, and binding him in bonds he will be powerless to rive away.'

'What young man?'

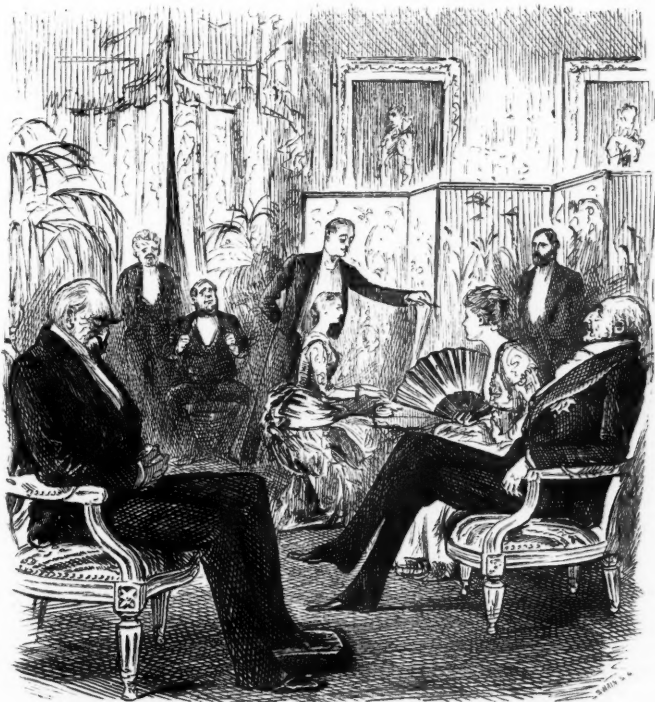
'My cousin Charles.'

'Nonsense, Lucy!' said Lady Grace, colouring slightly and looking vexed.

'You cannot help yourself. You bewitch every one, down to old Jonathan the gardener, and Tom the stable boy. You cannot help it. You have thrown your glamour over my cousin. I can see it. When he leaves this place he will feel like the Swiss exiled from the Alpine air and roses to be pastrycook in Amsterdam. You remember that queer girl we had at the Lodge, and who ran away. You did the same with her, and she sent you a necklace in token of undying devotion. Now you are playing tricks with Charles. Take care that you do not encourage him to do something equally absurd. As for my father and Beavis, you know very well they would let themselves be cut to pieces in your service.'

On the twenty-second of the month, Mr. Cheek senior arrived, and was invited to dine at the Court, along with his son and the Worthivales. The old trader was highly gratified. He was struck with the grand staircase, the well-lighted magnificent rooms, rich with gilding, pictures, and silk curtains, with the livery servants, and the general ease and luxury. He was courteously received, somewhat ceremoniously, and he had a few words with the Duke, who made himself agreeable, as he could when he chose, by touching on a subject likely to delight the old man.

‘What a very nice fellow your son is, Mr. Cheek! He has enlivened our rather dull society of late. I do not know what we should have done without him. Beavis is our usual *pièce de résistance*, but Beavis has been out of sorts lately. We feel under a debt to you for having spared him so long.’



Mr. Cheek held up his head. ‘Your Grace is too complimentary.’

‘Not at all. I always speak my mind.’

The General came up. ‘I am glad to make your acquaintance, sir,’ said Lord Ronald; ‘though I owe you a grudge, and I do not know that I shall ever be Christian enough to forgive you. Your boy ought to have been in the army.’

‘My fault, my lord. Bitterly regret it now—when too late. A mistake.’

‘It was a mistake. He is a daring fellow. He was hunting the other day, and took the hedges splendidly. No end of pluck in him. Sad pity he is not in the army.’

The delighted father watched his son all the evening. He did not talk much himself, and Lord Edward and the General found him difficult to get on with. The reason was that his attention was taken up in contemplating his son with admiration and wonder. He could not have been more astonished had he assisted at a miracle. Charles was at ease in this society. Charles could talk, and make the great people listen to him. After dinner Charles played and sang a solo, talked to Lucy Worthivale, and sent her into a fit of laughter, stood in the window in familiar discussion with the Marquis, then went to the Duke, conversed with him, then at his request sang a duet with Lady Grace. After that Charles was on an ottoman with the lady, talking to her in an animated way, expressing himself with his hands like a Frenchman, whilst her colour came and she smiled. She coloured because she remembered the words of Lucy.

Mr. Cheek was struck with her; her delicate beauty and purity impressed him. He was not afraid of her, but he had not the courage to get up from his place and walk across the room to speak to her. Presently she came over to him, and talked, and the old man felt as though a light shone round him, and a sense of reverence and holy love came upon him. He did not remember afterwards what she said, or what he answered, but thought that he had been in a dream. Afterwards, when she was at the piano again, he watched her, and shook his head, and smiled. Then he looked at Charles turning the pages of her music for her, and he said to himself, ‘Charles is a genius! It is not in me. The Duke and that old soldier chap didn’t pile it on too much. He is all they said, and more. Worthivale was right. This is the element in which he must swim.’

Mr. Cheek and the steward walked home together, Charles and Beavis went on before.

‘Are they not charming people? Is not the house quite perfect?’ asked Mr. Worthivale.

‘This the style of daily life?’ asked Mr. Cheek.

‘Always the same—of course.’

‘And the income, the debts, the mortgages, the outs always the same?’ said Mr. Cheek. ‘Nothing for it but a smash-up. Seen

the accounts. Balance bad. I—even I—with the Monokeros on my back, couldn't afford it.'

'You have never seen this sort of life before,' said the steward, reproachfully, 'and so—it rather surprises you. Splendid, is it not? and so homely and genial too.'



'Won't go on,' said the man of business. 'Can't do it on the balance. Col-lapse.'

'I hope not—I trust not.'

'I can help them. I can save them.'

'I knew it, I was sure of it,' exclaimed the delighted steward.

'I see they like Charlie, and Charlie likes to be on this shelf. I don't. I ain't suited to it. Set me on end on the floor. Don't

roll me up and chuck me aloft on a top shelf. Charlie can take that place, and he shall. I like to see him there.'

'He conducts himself very well, but what has he to do with the present emergency?'

'Everything. Charlie shall make Lady Grace his missus. Then he'll belong to the aristocracy, whatever I may be.'

'What!' Mr. Worthivale sprang back, and his hat fell off.

'Charlie shall make his proposals to Lady Grace, and I'll find two hundred thousand pounds to clear off such of the mortgages as are now troublesome. The Monokeros is still alive, and bringing in money for Charlie and his deary. If this ain't a handsome offer, show me one that is. If you don't like my shop, go to another.'

'Are you mad? You must be mad!' exclaimed the steward, too amazed to be indignant. 'Your son and SHE! What are you thinking of?'

'What am I thinking of? Mutual accommodation. As you said to me, I want blood, and they want money. Is it a deal?'

Mr. Worthivale stared at his guest, and remained rooted to the spot.

'Madman!' he gasped. 'Is nothing sacred with you?'

'As you like,' said the trader, indifferently. 'Take my offer or reject it. I can do without better than you.'

'Not a word of this raving nonsense to a soul,' said Mr. Worthivale, grasping his arm. 'Lord! I wouldn't have any one hear of this for all I am worth.'

'As you like,' said Mr. Cheek, putting his hands in his pockets. 'Those are my terms.'

(To be continued.)



